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The Kays.



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*Books by Margaret Deland*

*The Kays*

*Around Old Chester*

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*An Old Chester Secret*

*The Vehement Flame*

*By Lorin Deland*

*Imagination in Business*

# The Keys

By  
MARGARET DELAND



"Seeing none but *I* makes much of naught"—He said,  
 "And human love needs human meriting:  
     How hast *thou* merited?  
     Alack, thou knowest not  
 How little worthy of any love thou art!  
 Whom wilt thou find to love ignoble thee—  
     Save Me, save only Me?"

New York and London  
HARPER & BROTHERS PUBLISHERS  
1926

## THE KAYS

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*First Edition*

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TO  
LORIN DELAND

*Who was obedient to the Heavenly Vision.*

May 12, 1926.



‡ *The Keys* ‡





# The Kays

## *Chapter One*

THE top floor of the Kays' big, silent stone house on High Street, in Old Chester, was an unfinished loft running from gable to gable. It was divided into thirds by two chimney-stacks, the dust thick upon their discolored bricks and ridges of crumbling mortar; against one of them, an old hoop-skirt tilted out like a giant bird cage. At each end of the room was a cobwebby window, but up under the ridgepole the sloping rafters disappeared in perpetual dusk. On the floor, trunks and bureaus lurked in the shadows of the eaves, and gayly flowered bandboxes were piled in leaning towers of Pisa. Here and there, from hooks in overhead beams, ancient clothing hung down into space. If a draft wandered through the dim emptiness, a dress or coat would move spectrally, then hang motionless again.

When little Arthur Kay sat on a bench close to one of the windows where there was light enough to study his lessons, or to sew a button on a bit of cloth—which was his mother's idea of playing—he was not disturbed by the darkness or the hanging suggestiveness of the old clothes, or even by queer

sounds that came sometimes from a room with barred windows, which was entered from the loft. For one thing, he was used to the place, having often sat there waiting for Mrs. Kay while she was in that room from which the noises came. He understood that she was "taking care" of somebody there—which meant, so far as he could see, that she did the sort of work that Betsey and Jane did downstairs, for generally she brought with her a broom and dustpan; or, in winter, a coal scuttle, so she could take up the ashes of a little soapstone stove whose rusty pipe pierced one of the great chimneys; sometimes she brought soiled linen out of the room and washed it in a tub by one of the windows, then hung it on a line stretched between the two chimney-stacks. As he waited for her, sitting on a trunk and banging his heels on its worn cow-hide, the child would trace with his little forefinger the letters K A Y in brass-headed nails on the hairy top; or watch a spider drop down an invisible thread and then run up again; and always he told himself stories of Indians hiding behind a dripping sheet, or of encounters with lions and tigers—or any of the pleasant things one thinks of in a shadowy loft. Often he could hear his mother singing to the person in the room, a nice story beginning:

"Lord Lovel he stood at his castle gate,  
Combing his milk-white steed . . ."

If it was very cold (the ell room was warmed from below, but except for the small stove the loft was unheated) his mother wrapped him in a shawl and let him hold her muff. Occasionally the closed door would open and she would give him a tin plate or cup to take downstairs, or bid him bring her this or that. He very rarely had a glimpse into the room, but once he saw a big woman trying to stroke his mother's shining hair and heard her call for flowers. "Bouquet! Bouquet!" she said; then burst out crying, which frightened him very much. The first time he was taken up to the loft and told to wait outside the door, he was only seven years old. He had waited, but he sulked because he wanted to go over to Lois Clark's and build a snowman; and while he sulked he listened to the noises in the room, or to his mother's voice, singing:

"... out of her bosom there grew a red rose,  
And out of his bosom a brier—'ier—'ier . . ."

It seemed a long time until she came back to him; when she did—a small gray shape in the brown dusk of the loft—she locked the door of the room behind her, sat down on a trunk, and took him on her knee.

"Arthur," she said, "there is a sick woman in that room. Her name is Mary. I take care of her, and now that you are such a big boy you can help me."

"Yes, ma'am," he said.

"She is locked up because she is what is called 'crazy.' Most of the time she is quiet and plays with her doll and her Ark, but sometimes she's unhappy, and cries. Do you understand?" Arthur, wondering if Bobby Buttrick and the Clark twins, Tom and Harry, were building the snowman with Lois, said, resignedly, "Yes, ma'am."

"You won't be afraid?" she said. Her hand, small and work-worn, touched his head gently, but her manner was uncompromising and her face—a delicate face, with a narrow forehead between silken loops of hair—was a mask of cold courage. Yet, in spite of the strength of unhumorous eyes and lips, there must have been timidity somewhere, for her voice had a flutter in it like the flutter of frightened wings. But always courage held the wings from flight! "Are you afraid?" she challenged the little boy.

"Naw!" he said, impatiently.

"You are never to repeat to anyone anything you may hear Mary say. Do you understand?"

"Yes, ma'am. May I go now?"

"Yes," she said, briefly.

She hadn't kissed him as he sat there on her knee, as most mothers would have done. She was never demonstrative. Her maternity seemed to be of the mind first, and then of the body. Old Chester said she was hard—"a hard, good woman," was what it said. Yet some people (Dr. Willy King was one)



felt a certain gentleness in her—even a sweetness, like pansies dim with ice blooming meagerly on the edge of snows; so her hardness must have been a surface thing. Her little boy could scarcely have loved her, but he trusted her, and he was never afraid of her, because she was never unjust. One might say the same thing of her dealings with the woman in the ell chamber; but Mary, in her vacant way, did love her. As for Arthur, when it came to affection, his dog Rover and fat black Betsey in the kitchen were his only outlets of emotion—though he had a shy, puppy worship of his father, whom he very rarely saw. Now, excused from his post beside Mary's door, he ran out of the loft, clattered over the twisting garret stairs, slid down two successive banisters, climbed a wall, and was in Lois Clark's snowy back garden. The little girl, seeing him, pointed a fierce red mitten at a retreating brother.

"Tom and Bobby wanted me to go over to Bobby's an' play," she said; "but I wouldn't, 'cause I promised to play with you. An' Tom said you were a 'fraidcat 'cause you didn't fight him that day he called your mother 'Mrs. Clothespin'! An' I said, 'I'll slap you, if you call Arthur names!'"

Young Thomas and the Buttrick boy, who was three or four years older than the other children, had departed, unalarmed and grinning, for Lois had never been known to slap anything. But her defending threat was very pleasing to Arthur. Lois knew

he wasn't a 'fraidcat! His satisfaction, however, was silent. He was often silent; he was a clear-eyed little boy, with rosy cheeks, and a dimple, and a terrier pluck. But the most striking thing about him—next to his faculty for holding his tongue—was his reasonableness. One could see why his mother had told him of Mary; he would understand! His understanding was increased by increasing responsibilities. "If at any time I have to be away," Mrs. Kay said, "when Mary is fussy, I shall want you to sit up here and call to her that nothing will hurt her, and to be quiet." Then she added: "I can't ask the servants to do this; they would be frightened. And also I don't want them to hear her—talking foolishly. You understand?"

"Yes, ma'am," he said. What he did not understand was why his father, when he was at home, should not tell Mary to be quiet—his father, who was never frightened, and had been to war 'way off in Mexico, and had a great big sharp sword hanging over the mantelpiece in his library! Arthur, climbing on a chair, had once dared to touch the old black scabbard with a worshiping finger. He had noticed that his mother never asked his father to do anything. He did not wonder why this was; he accepted it—as he did the fact that his father was away a great deal, and that when he was at home he had better things to eat than his mother had, and that he lived on the ground floor of the great house,

and never came upstairs; and that he went to Dr. Lavendar's church instead of going to the chapel of the True Followers in Upper Chester with Arthur and his mother. Arthur just accepted these things, and when Mrs. Kay was out and Mary was "fussy," he would trot up to the garret (taking Rover along for company), and sit outside that closed room, with its animal noises and odors, and call through the key-hole, "Nothing will hurt you; please be quiet, Mary." Then he would study his tables, or look out of the window; or, sturdily, because his mother had asked him to help her, try, with clumsy little fingers, to sew a seam. He was apparently indifferent to the darkness of empty spaces, and the mysterious possibilities behind hanging sheets, and Mary's scuffling noises; all of which was rather remarkable endurance in a child of his age.

But he was early trained in endurance! Take that matter of food. He was five when his mother, without giving any reason to her kitchen, had suddenly ordered for him and for herself meals plain to the point of meagerness—in striking contrast to his father's abundant gourmandizing. She must have given some reason to her husband, for there was a scene at table, which probably greatly interested their servants. Indeed, it interested Arthur, who caught from his mother's lips the wonderful phrase, "bread of damnation," and later used it artlessly—until Mrs. Kay overheard him, and said that little

boys mustn't say such words. Then she made some explanation as to the leanness of her end of the table: "Don't repeat what I am going to tell you to Jane and Betsey; but for reasons which you are not yet old enough to understand, I prefer to buy your food and mine with my own money."

"'Stead of father's money?" Arthur pressed.

She hesitated; then said, "Yes."

"Betsey said she was mad to have to cook two diff'ent dinners," said little Arthur; "an' she said people would say you were crazy, too, like Mary."

"What people say is of no importance, Arthur."

The little boy sighed; but all he said was, "I *do* like tarts."

Afterwards Dr. Lavendar, hearing how the child went tartless, and watched outside that door in the loft, and as he grew older lugged coal up the narrow garret stairs for the little stove, said that some of those Yankees (Agnes Kay was a New Englander) had steel rods for backbones! He also said that she was the kind of mother who would *present* a fox to her boy. (The habits of Spartan boys and foxes not being known to certain Little Pitchers, at least one Old Chester child thought that Mrs. Kay had given her son some kind of a pet.) It was about the time that the "fox" was put into his bosom in the dark loft, that Lois had threatened to slap her brother for calling Arthur a 'fraidcat—"just 'cause he wouldn't fight!" It all came about because one



very cold day Arthur had asked his mother if he might carry her muff to school. She said he might, and he went off with his little hands tucked into its warm and shabby depths. The effect at school can be imagined. Somebody yelled, "Hullo, Miss Dimple!" the Buttrick boy hooted, "Girl!" and Tommy Clark, more imaginative than the rest, added the descriptive insult of saying that Arthur was carrying "Mrs. Clothespin's" muff. Arthur, hopping up and down with shame and rage, pitched the muff into an icy puddle, flew at Tommy and kicked his shins; then turned on Bobby Buttrick and smacked his cheek even harder than he had kicked Tommy; he hated Bobby, anyhow, because his pockets were always full of cake crumbs, and whenever, at school, he pulled out his grubby handkerchief, he scattered them about on Arthur's desk. Unhappily, just at that minute when everything was most promising—Lois screaming on the side lines, and all three boys making insulting gestures and doubling up their fists—Mrs. Kay came down the street. Immediately, with a small relentless hand (and quoting Scripture) she dragged her son home—he vociferating all the while, "*I won't* be a peace-acher! I want to fight!" and digging protesting heels into the path. Later, in her own room, she further instructed him:

"Tommy called me 'Mrs. Clothespin' because I don't wear hoop skirts. I consider them wrong be-

cause they are foolish. But if, compared to other ladies, Tommy thinks I look like a clothespin, he had a right to say so. If he said it rudely, that is his affair, not yours."

"Him and Bobby called me names! Him and Bobby said I was a girl—'cause I had—had—had your m-muff!" The last word was a scream of rage.

"Are you a girl?"

"No!"

"Then what they say, being untrue, is of no importance. Now, Arthur, let us reason together: Is it wicked to be a girl?"

Arthur opened his lips, but could think of nothing to say.

"If Tommy and Bobby call you a girl, it is either because you are—"

"I AIN'T!"

"—or because they have rude thoughts. If the thoughts in their minds are rude, will hitting them make the thoughts polite?"

Instinct, still blubbering, retorted to Reason: "They said they 'spised me 'cause I was a girl; I'm going to lick 'em—"

"Will licking them make them like you?"

"I 'spise them! An' I'll lick 'em, and I'll pull their ears off; 'en they'll see I'm braver 'an 'em!"

"You are not brave at all unless you are brave enough not to fight."

Arthur, his rosy, dirty cheeks still streaked with

tears, countered with unexpected acuteness: "My father's brave. He fought. He went to war and killed people. With a sword."

To which his mother said, coldly, "We are to love our enemies, Arthur, not kill them. War is wicked, because it is murder and hate. And it is foolish, because hate and murder can only destroy people's bodies, not change their minds."

Poor little Arthur said, blankly, "Huh?" So she put it in simpler words.

"Fighting should be left to dogs and cats and chickens, who can't reason. To-morrow you must ask Tommy and Bobby to forgive you. If you don't, I shall be ashamed of you. And now I want you to repeat after me a little verse—'Let dogs delight to bark and bite'—Say it, Arthur."

There was an angry mumble: "Dogs . . . 'light."

"'For God hath made them so.' Say it."

And the little boy said it, still crying with rage. (It appears that he obeyed her and did ask to be forgiven, and, having done so, immediately spat at both his enemies!)

Almost at the same moment that Arthur was commanded to apologize for being human and to memorize Isaac Watts, Mrs. Buttrick was weeping over her big Bobby and telling him never to fight; he might get hurt. (The Buttricks were common people; not really of Old Chester.) And the twins' dark-eyed mother—quick-tempered and sweet-

hearted—was saying to her blubbering cub, “Better not fight, Tom; but if you do, hit hard and win!—or I’ll spank you!” But she laughed her loud, musical laugh. Ellen Clark’s laughter always made you think of banners in the wind! Her retort to life was gayety. It was said that she entered her children’s births on the flower-garlanded page of the family Bible in red ink, “because red ink was cheerful”.

Of course Mrs. Kay’s Sermon on the Mount teaching, and that sense of responsibility born in the darkness of the loft, and a happy pride in being useful (which made Arthur learn, painfully, to darn stockings or do anything else to “help Mother”)—all such things inclined him to separateness, and as a result he lived silently. Lois Clark was his only intimate, and he was not talkative, even to her, but often, when he was on guard outside Mary’s door, he coaxed her to keep him company. Her brothers didn’t like the loft and wouldn’t come, and neither would the Buttrick boy. But Arthur didn’t want any of them. Bobby was always eating cake, and he told lies once in a while; and Arthur thought the Clark twins stupid—which indeed they were! Nice, unimaginative little animals who, when cornered by one of Arthur’s eager arguments as to *why* boys might not sew as well as girls, had no retort except the *non sequitur*, “Then why don’t you wear petticoats!” Lois, too, like the boys, hated the loft

and preferred to play out in the sunshine, or in the Clarks' unused carriage-house, which smelled of rats and harness and old hay, and where one could escape from Indians by hiding in empty oat-bins or clambering into a dilapidated carriage—a relic of the Clarks' days of affluence. When Lois suggested the carriage-house, Arthur, to induce her to come up to his loft, had to reason with her—as his mother did with him:

“How can Mary hurt you? Isn't the door locked on our side? She can't come out through the key-hole, can she? Come on up!”

And Lois, with dog-like affection, always came. But sometimes she asked questions, such as: Why did his mother keep the crazy lady in the loft, and why didn't Arthur give her flowers—“to stop her hollerin' for em!” And why did his father have nicer things to eat than his mother did? And why did he sew?—“our twins wouldn't!”

“How do you know my father has nicer things to eat?”

“Your Betsey told our Emma.”

Arthur explained that he sewed to help Mother; and as for the lady, she was a friend of Mother's; and he couldn't give her flowers 'cause Mother didn't allow him to go into the ell chamber; and Mother said she liked her money better 'an father's money, an' so she bought things to eat out of her money. “Promise not to tell,” he cautioned her.



"I won't," said little Lois.

"My father is a great big soldier," Arthur boasted; "he's bigger than the President of the United States. And he has a sword three yards long. An' he can fire cannons and guns and pistols, and kill people—oh, a hundred a minute. So he has more money 'an Mother, and can have damnation tarts."

"Oh, Arthur, that's a naughty word!"

"No; it's the name of the things I promised Mother not to eat," he explained.

"But why," Lois ruminated, "does Mrs. Kay do the crazy lady's washing? I think it's funny for her to."

For this Arthur had no explanation, so later he passed it on to his mother, "Lois says it's funny for you to wash Mary's clothes," to which Agnes Kay replied, briefly:

"There are times when I cannot ask the servants to do it, Arthur, because it is unpleasant. And what Lois thinks is of no importance."

Lois' wondering thoughts about Arthur's parents did not go further than Arthur's own ears; her elders were not sufficiently interesting to talk about. Of course, having promised, she didn't tell anybody, even her beloved Emma, that Mrs. Kay "liked her money better 'an Major Kay's money"; nor did she mention that Arthur wasn't allowed to go into Mary's room and give her flowers. As for the

darning, she only defended him for doing it by saying, "If it isn't in the Commandments that it's wrong for a boy to sew, then it entirely ain't!"

Once, however, as innocent of gossip as a lamb, she did start a Kay story which made Old Chester frown at what it called the Major's profanity. It appears that on a Sunday afternoon in May little Lois got out of her bedroom window on to the roof of a shed, scrambled down a trellis to the ground, trotted into the back garden, and climbing into the white fragrance of a blossoming pear tree, began to study her *Catechism for Babes*. It was then that she saw Arthur, with Rover at his elbow, looking wistfully down from the open window of the loft. "Will you hear me?" she called up to him. He called back, mournfully, that he couldn't come over to her, 'cause his mother was at church and Mary was "fussy."

"Well, I'll come up," Lois said—Lois never waited to be invited; she always took the initiative in friendliness. She tiptoed into the big silent house, climbed two flights of stairs and the twisted steps to the loft, and squatted down by the window—as far away as she could get from that unpleasant room.

Arthur, with Rover's cold nose pressing against his cheek, began at once on the business of the Catechism. "Let's get through with it," he said, resignedly.

"'What is your name?' "

Lois, faithful to the text, replied: " 'N, or M.' " A little further on the lesson paused because they became involved in a theological discussion. Arthur said:

"Why did God send His son to get crucified, 'stead of coming Himself? It was mean in Him, to send a small little boy. I don't like God much, and some day, when I get time, I'll tell Him so." He hadn't time at the moment because he had to call through the keyhole to Mary.

"Never mind about God," Lois said. "Hear me the rest."

But they got stranded on the Trinity. "How could you make three men out of one man?" Arthur scoffed. "If you cut him up, only two of 'em could have a leg."

"I don't know!" Lois said, impatiently.

"Let's look in the Bible," Arthur said. It was Lois' report of what occurred then that shocked Old Chester.

It appears that the two children, sliding down the banisters to the library to hunt for a Bible, found Kay (a retired officer of the regular army, at present in a business which kept him much away from home) lounging in a big chair with his feet on his desk. He must have been very handsome before dissipation confessed itself in the relaxed flabbiness of his face; even yet he was known in certain circles as Beau Kay. Now, with a decanter, and a plum cake

in a big silver cake-basket on the table beside him, a cigar in his mouth, and that wonderful sword on the wall over the mantelpiece, he was reading *The Adventures of Mr. Verdant Green*, when, entering softly, came his little boy—with Lois at his heels and Rover at her heels.

"Hullo, Towhead," the Major said. "What do you want?"

"A Bible," said Arthur.

"Hell!" said his father. "Why don't you say tin soldiers? Are you a canary-bird-and-tatting young man? Come here," he added, good-naturedly, "and I'll show you some pictures." He hardly knew the child. He was very rarely at home, and when he was, he had nothing to do with him, for Arthur was an annoying reminder of personal humiliations. But to his surprise, now, he found himself saying, "Come here—"

Arthur, his face suddenly eager, said, "Please, sir, first may I hold the sword, and show it to Lois?"

Major Kay, amused, got up and took the sword from its hooks on the chimney breast. "Let's see you salute!" he said; then, laughing, he folded Arthur's fingers around the hilt and lifted the excited little hand to the child's chin. "Look out—Look out!" he remonstrated, steadying the wabbling blade. "Don't cut your nose off! You've got rather a handsome nose. Like mine. 'Six inches in front—edge to the left!'" Arthur, panting with wor-

shipping obedience, did just as he was told, and the Major was immensely diverted. "It looks," he said, hanging up the sacred relic, "as if you were a soldier's son, after all. Blue-molding for a fight! (I wish," he thought, "I'd blocked her confounded Round Table idea of naming him *Arthur*. He ought to have been called—well, any name fit for a man—or a horse!")

The Major's breath reeked with liquor. (Of course Old Chester disapproved of George Kay. Not because he drank too much—almost every gentleman in town did that; but because the people who had drawn unlucky numbers in a lottery in which he had a controlling interest were shocked at his business morals.)

When he sat down, Lois, uninvited and forgetting the Catechism, perched on his knee and slipped an arm around his neck. His big black eyes beamed with pleasure. "I know a story," she said, shyly anxious to be entertaining, "Emma read it to me—it's a Sabbath-day story," she added, hastily. (Those were the days of week-day books and Sunday books.)

"I am very particular as to what I hear on the Sabbath day," the Major said.

"It's about crocodiles and missionaries," Lois said, timidly.

"There is nothing more interesting than croco-

diles and missionaries—when properly combined,” he said.

“Tell it!” Arthur commanded, gaping with interest.

So Lois, eager and important, began, in a little, breathless voice: “There were six little, teeny, weeny crocodiles. An’ the mother crocodile was wicked. An’ she bit off a missionary’s leg—”

“That was a mistake. Missionaries are tough.”

“So a bad man killed the mother crocodile—”

“Shocking!” said George Kay.

“An’—an’ the baby crocodiles were left all alone in the mud. With nobody to nurse ’em. An’ ”—

“Or put clean bibs on them?” the Major said, horrified.

“Aw, what was the difference?” Arthur scoffed; “the mother oughtn’t to have bit the gentleman’s leg off.”

“I guess God loved the baby crocodiles,” Lois retorted, “as much as He loved the missionary!”

“Better—much better,” her other auditor assured her.

“Anyway, they got hungry,” Lois said, resentfully—(nobody likes to have a story spoiled!)—“an’ they cried, an’ ”—her little tender, breathless voice suddenly shook—“an’ cried. They just sobbed.”

“The sobs of infant crocodiles would move even a Presbyterian heart,” the Major said.

Lois looked at him; her lip trembled. "They entirely *died*," she said in a whisper. Her eyes filled—brimmed; two tears slipped down her cheeks.

The Major was terrified. ("Except temptation," he used to say, "a woman's tears are the only things I can't resist!") He fumbled for his handkerchief and made awkward dabs at her eyes. "Your father was a soldier," he reminded her, "and soldiers' daughters don't cry. Stop, and I'll tell you how he fought in the Seminole War!" Lois, instantly forgetting the crocodiles, smiled. "A good fight," the Major rallied her, "is the most glorious thing on earth, and your father—" He was determined to change the subject, but Arthur, remembering the immortal Isaac's effusion, interrupted:

"Is it glorious when chickens fight?"

The Major chuckled. "I'll take you to see a cock-fight, one of these days," he said; "and if you bet on the right bird, you'll think it's glorious!" Then, noticing some anxious glances at the silver basket, he remembered the plum cake. "Have a slice, Pretty Dear?" he said.

"Oh *yes!*" Lois said, ecstatically. And Arthur, too, put out an eager paw. But Kay looked doubtful. "Isn't this damnation cake, young man? Mustn't break your word to your mother, you know!"

Arthur sighed miserably. "I forgot," he said.

His father stoically put the rich black slice back



in the basket. "That's right," he said; "a soldier never breaks his word." (In his own mind he said, "his damn fool word"! ) But he put his arm over the boy's shoulder and, with his cigar between his sensitive, unsteady fingers, began to turn over the pages of his beloved book, telling stories as he went along of each of the enchanting pictures, which those of us who had jolly fathers whose reading was not confined to Sabbath-day books, know so well.

"You see," Kay explained, consolingly (he was really unhappy about the withheld cake!) "Verdant Green had gone on a spree and—"

"What is a spree?" said Lois.

But Arthur, before his father could answer, remembering why they had come into the library, said, "What is the Holy Ghost, sir?"

Kay took his cigar out of his mouth, stared at his son, then shouted with laughter. "What is a spree? What is the Holy Ghost? Children, I'll tell you a profound secret. *They're the same thing!* Remember that, Lois, when you get married," he added, cynically, "and you and your husband will live happy ever afterward." Then cynicism faded into eagerness. "Want a jack-knife, Arthur?" (He would make up to him for the withheld cake!) "Just right for a boy who likes a sword." He took a knife out of his pocket—but Arthur drew back;

he even put his hands behind him and shook his head; but he looked longingly at the knife.

"Did you buy it with your money?" he said.

"Whose money did you suppose I used?" the Major inquired.

"Well, I hoped it was Mother's," Arthur said, and sighed, for it was really a wonderful knife, with a stag handle and five blades, and a hook to take a stone out of a horse's shoe! "If you bought it with your money, I mustn't take it," he said, gulping.

George Kay put the knife into his pocket. "Clear out, both of you," he said, and opened *Mr. Verdant Green*. But his mind didn't follow the text, and his face—sensuous and honorable, and humorous,—fell into harsh lines. "Why the devil did I marry her?" he was thinking. By and by he added, "She was an icicle". Which fact, though he didn't know it, was really the answer to his tragic question, for to a man like George Kay, to whom any intense emotion was an expression of the Infinite, or, as he put it, "the Holy Ghost," the icicle is a challenge! But the clear shining coldness—the rectitude without imagination—which had lured him, was not an icicle; it was a crystal, which may break but can never melt.

Old Chester's version of what happened that Sunday afternoon in Major Kay's library (reported by little literal Lois and transmitted by her mother) was that the Major ate damnation cake and said that the Holy Ghost was a spree. When this state-

ment came back finally to Kay himself, he roared with laughter; then his eyes narrowed. "Old Chester measures Dionysus by its own foot-rule. I don't give a twopenny damn for its opinion."

This opinion had long been that Kay was profane, that he loved the ladies, and that he drank more wine for his stomach's sake than St. Paul advised. Also it was known that somewhere down South, before his marriage, he had killed in a duel—most of his friends said "very properly"!—a man who, when drunk, had said something offensive about his mother. Then there was the fact that his wealth (like that of many a better man) was due to his interest in a certain very successful state lottery; but though this was perhaps regrettable, the public conscience in those days was not uncomfortable about lotteries, so Old Chester's opinion was not too severe. In fact, its thought of the Major, in regard to wine, women, and lotteries, could be summed up by saying that he was a "bad lot." And everybody liked him.

Mrs. Kay also, when it came to opinion, "didn't give a damn"—though she didn't express it in those words! To begin with, she made no effort to hide the fact that her marriage was unhappy—"a state of things," Old Chester said, "which every refined female endeavors to conceal." So far from concealing it, Mrs. George Kay never even took the trouble to deny a story told by the monthly nurse,

to the effect that at the hour of Arthur's birth she had said, in her agony, to her husband, "It will be *mine*; you've forfeited your right to it!" From the same source, Old Chester learned that the morning of the day the baby was born she had received a letter; "And," the nurse said, "she read it, an' then she called out his name, kind of frantic. 'George,' she says, 'you are a evil man!' she says; 'I'll never bring another child of yours into the world!' she says; 'it would be a sin.' And she throwed the letter into the fire," the nurse added, disgustedly—an action which probably explained why Old Chester didn't know more of Major Kay's affairs. "But think of a respectable married lady talkin' about 'not bringin' a child into the world!'—*I* call it real impyous," said the nurse. "Well, then she was took sick right off." No wonder the nurse was shocked. Every new truth begins in a shocking heresy, and in those days it was an accepted fact that to continue to live with an immoral husband was the sign of a virtuous wife. So Mrs. Kay's standards of propriety and duty were at least sixty years in advance of her time. Later, when George Kay made his fortune in the Old Reliable Lottery, his wife was again a rebel—or as some people may think, a forerunner into idealism; at any rate she was a voice crying in the wilderness, for nobody else would have refused, as she did, to eat the "bread of dam-

nation"! She would not, she told him, calmly, "be a partner in his iniquity."

"Well, you have a right to go hungry if you want to," he said, contemptuously. She didn't go hungry, having a little money of her own. (She was of one of those "I am holier than thou" Yankee families—that was Kay's expression—who had managed to scrape up a good deal of money in cotton; Democrats, of course.) But she did join the Pennsylvania Society for the Suppression of Lotteries—which was a public rebuke to her husband. This, too, displeased Old Chester, for custom demanded that a woman must not only endure and hide marital infelicity, she must also never imply that her husband could err. But Old Chester's opinion on these serious matters of behavior did not, apparently, interest Agnes Kay; nor would she have given the twopenny damn for what people thought on less serious matters, either, such as that, being an abolitionist and helping runaway slaves through to Canada, she sometimes sat down and ate with them! Even her own colored servants were shocked by that. This, too, was a tacit criticism of her husband, who, before his fine record in the Mexican War, had fought "gloriously" against the Seminoles, thereby returning five hundred slaves to their grateful owners. In a time of enormous hoops, she wore straight-up-and-down skirts. Instead of being an Episcopalian like everybody else, she be-

longed to a little sect of worthy, but plain, people—the “True Followers,” who had such an entirely unorthodox respect for the character of Deity, that they did not believe He would be wicked enough to damn anybody eternally. (It was doubtless these loose ideas about God that started the rumor that Mrs. Kay had been known to sew, *on Sunday!*) Also she wouldn’t touch wine—a reflection not only upon her husband, but upon every other man in the county! Nevertheless, Old Chester’s opinion was that, though queer, she was good. And nobody liked her. As for keeping a crazy woman locked up in the top of the house—well, she certainly was good to do that, said Old Chester. “Probably it’s some afflicted relative. But why is she so close-mouthed? Why doesn’t she say who she is?” She didn’t say, even to Dr. King, who saw the woman occasionally, or to her husband. The Major, too, could think what he pleased. (Nor did she say that she never turned the key in the insane woman’s door without a tremor of fear!) But when the loft was first put to its sinister use, George Kay was away from home, so he knew nothing about it.

It was when Arthur was still a baby that the story of the loft began.

It was a May day. The soft air was full of the perfume of lemon lilies and lilacs; over the loft window wistaria, roping across the gable end of the house, hung in a faintly fragrant purple fringe, and



next door the Clark orchard shimmered with the white unconsuming fire of blossoming pear trees. Agnes Kay had brought her little boy out to sit under the looping gold of a laburnum, in grass that was blue with violets. She watched him, laughing sometimes her brief, infrequent laugh, and pelting him with violets; once when a golden link fell on her sleek head, she bent over so that the baby could clutch it, crowing.

Then, through the lacy greenness of the trees netted in sunshine, she heard from the road a voice, "Ma'am, is your name Kay?" A carryall had drawn up at the big wrought-iron gates that shut the garden from the street, and a man was signalling with his whip.

She looked up and called, "Yes?" But even at that distance she could see the worried excitement of his face, so she picked her baby up and came down the path between the blossoming syringas and bridal wreath. In those days she was not a True Follower, so she had not given up outward adorning and plaiting of hair and putting on of apparel. She still wore rings and ribbons and spreading flounces, like everybody else, and her shining hair was caught in clustering curls behind her pretty ears. To be sure, above her furbelows her eyes were tragic, but she had a coldly classic loveliness that allured, even though it chilled. "Well?" she said to the man standing, whip in hand, at the gate.



"This lady," he said, pointing back at his fare, "come to my boardin'-house in Mercer, last month. And she got sick, and cried and talked to herself, and took on. Doctor said she wasn't right in her head—no, she won't hurt you," he reassured his listener, who looked suddenly frightened. "She said she wanted to come to Old Chester to see a lady named Kay."

"See *me*?"

"'Bout a week ago," the man went on, "she got real noisy. Kep' hollerin'. My wife said, 'Better take her along to her friend.' So I told her I'd fetch her. Then she quieted some. 'Course, I knowed she was queer the day she come. Sensible sometimes; then kind o' droolin' silly, playin' with a kind o' man baby-doll she kep' in her bag. I hope she don't get to hollerin' now!"

Agnes, glancing out at the carryall, shook her head. "I don't know her."

The handsome, slovenly-looking woman lolling on the back seat had a bunch of wilted lilacs in her lap; a handful of wild flowers—columbines and meadow rue and violets—had fallen on the floor of the carriage and were being ground under her dusty shoes. She looked at the lady on the other side of the gate and said, fumbling thickly over the words, something like "bouquet." The driver made a despairing gesture.

"There! There she goes again. That's how she

takes on all the time. If I've stopped once, I've stopped a dozen times to pick posies for her!"

"What is her name?" Agnes Kay said, very low.

"She said she was Miss Mary Bell." He heard the lady gasp; she put her hand over her mouth and seemed to stop breathing. "She wouldn't tell where she lived, except she come from Kentucky. Well, all I know is"—he hesitated, with a sheepish laugh, "she said, 'Mrs. Kay owed her something.' Like enough she made it up. Crazy people do. But she said she belonged here."

There was silence. Then the pale lips said, "She does." The baby crowed and, pointing to the woman in the carriage, said, "P'ty—p'ty!"

"Well, then," said the man, "do, for the Lord's sake, take her! She's as crazy as a bedbug. And fur as I make out, she ain't got no money. Spent it all gettin' North, I suppose. Owes me pretty near a month's board. 'Course I couldn't keep her no longer. And it's cost me something to drive her here and back; I'll be a long day on it. I couldn't send her in the stage; I knew she'd get to rowin'."

"I will pay you."

"I've come," said the big, untidy woman, nodding.

Agnes Kay put her child down on the grass. She trembled so that she caught at an iron spear of the gate to keep from falling. Arthur began to cry, and the driver tried to soothe him.

"Now there, baby, stop yer noise! Is there any-

body round to help me get her out of the carriage? Like as not she won't budge." He was sorry for the speechless lady, looking with frightened eyes at his crazy fare—but he had to get rid of the creature somehow!

Mrs. Kay said, "There is no one."

"Ain't you got a girl?" he pressed, doubtfully.

"I wish no assistance." But her small white hands shook as she swung the clanging gate open. She went out to the carriage and looked at the handsome woman with the silly eyes. "Get out," she said. Her voice had the compulsion of a hand.

The woman obeyed without a word, all her flowers tumbling from her lap to the ground, at which she laughed foolishly; then Mrs. Kay's gleaming curls seemed to attract her, and she leaned forward and caught her fingers in them.

"*Don't touch me!*" Agnes said, so violently that the driver, startled, said again, "She won't hurt you!"

Mrs. Kay, smoothing her hair, said only, "Bring her things into the house, please."

Before the pallid terror of her face, the man hesitated. "Maybe it ain't just right to leave her. Is your husband in? Maybe better ask him?"

"He is not in. Come," she said to the woman; but she did not look at her. She went, in her flounced lavender muslin skirts, Arthur crowing and bubbling over her shoulder, up the garden path between the

blossoming bushes. The woman followed, heavily, talking to herself; the driver, behind her, carried two large carpet bags. There was no sign of life in the front part of the great house, drowsing in the May sunshine behind its bowed shutters. Agnes Kay went through the wide hall to the staircase curving up into the cool darkness of the second story. The man followed her, his steps creaking on the stairs. "She's harmless," he said again, in a loud whisper; "she's only just scared that folks will treat her bad."

"She will not be treated badly here." At a door in the upper hall the stately young figure paused; then stood aside, and with a strange gesture of finality ushered the shuffling woman into her own room.

The man put the red-and-blue-flowered carpet bags down and looked about him, impressed by the high ceiling and the spaciousness; here, too, the shutters were bowed, and from between them narrow fingers of sunshine fell across the white matting and touched the snowy valances of the four-posted bedstead. The woman went to the bed at once and threw herself down on it; she was asleep even while Mrs. Kay was still speaking. "You may go," she told the man; "but give me your name and address, so I can send you your money."

He gave it. "I'm glad she's got a friend to care for her," he said.

"A friend?" Anger, like sudden livid lightning

flashed over her face—and was gone. “I will care for her,” she said.

She heard his steps echoing down through the silent house—and he heard the baby’s chuckle as the child, pointing at the fat woman with the dusty shoes, asleep on the immaculate whiteness of the bed, cried, “P’ty—p’ty—”

Of course Old Chester heard the story of that strange arrival; but it knew nothing except the fact, stated by the driver of the carryall when on his way home he stopped for refreshment at the tavern, that he had brought a crazy passenger to Mrs. Kay’s; and Mrs. Kay had said she belonged there. She certainly stayed there! That first night she spent locked in Agnes Kay’s room, but the next day the ell chamber which opened into the loft was prepared for her. No one, except sometimes Dr. King (who himself screwed the iron bars over the windows), ever saw her. And no one heard her, unless, very rarely, her wailing was louder than usual.

When the Major came home, almost a year later, it was nearly a month before he heard any unusual sounds; when he did he asked a puzzled question. His wife answered, briefly, that there was an insane woman in the loft. “She has no friends. She came while you were away. I am taking care of her.”

“A relation of yours, I suppose?”

“She is connected with my family.”

"Why don't you send her to an asylum?"

"She ought to be here. Under this roof."  
(Those were the days when an insane asylum was a stigma.)

"Well, don't let the child see her," he said. He had no opportunity to see her himself, because since Arthur's birth, in acutely mortified acceptance of his wife's wishes, he had lived on the ground floor of his great house, sleeping in a small room connected with his library. He never went upstairs.

His wish that the child shouldn't see the insane woman was the first expression of awareness of his son's existence. Two or three years later he again displayed a sort of concern for him. One day, after a heavy shower, he asked his wife, abruptly: "Why does that boy hide in the cellar in a thunderstorm? I found him in a dark corner when I went down to get a bottle of wine. Is he timid?"

"His dog is timid. I told him to take him there, so that Rover shouldn't see the lightning."

"Oh," he said, relieved, "is that it? I couldn't believe that *my* son could be a coward!" But he was not interested in his son. Arthur was the symbol of his discomfiture as a man and a husband and the master of a house. Indeed, it was not until that Sunday afternoon in his library that the boy became an entity to him; and then the first faint stirring of affection was lost in irritation at Arthur's refusal of the jackknife. Of course he knew that his wife was



responsible for the refusal; she had lately joined the True Followers and, having become as eccentric in her ideas as in her dress, she was starving the boy to death and teaching him all sorts of preachy stuff!

It was when Arthur was twelve, and was really getting a little morose about the tarts he didn't have, that his mother made some sort of explanation to him as to why she preferred her money to his father's. It was a long story, with many long words in it—"gambling," "lotteries," "hot coals on Moloch's altar"—which Arthur didn't understand. But he did understand that his father was doing "something wrong," to get that money which paid for the tarts.

As she spoke, his mother's narrow, delicate face, between the silken loops of hair (there were no curls, now) had the relentlessness of a shining blade. She ended with her usual phrase, "Now let us reason together: if we ate food bought with money—made that way—would we be honest?"

He was silent; but the shock of knowledge which a child ought not to have brought a scared look into his face.

"When you are twenty-one," she went on, "you will receive a little money which your grandfather left you, and then you can have whatever food you please. But now,"—she paused—perhaps she herself quailed at the test she was about to put to him—"even now you are old enough to decide for your-



self about your father's food. . . . You can have it, if you wish it."

He said in a whisper, "I don't!"—and she gave a gasp of relief. As for the little boy, the dimple in his rosy cheek lengthening into a hard angry line, he ran out to the stable, found a brick, and with set teeth banged and banged and banged a stone post with it until the brick broke. Then he went into the stable (against rules!), sidled into Good Girl's stall, and, putting his face against her velvet nose, blubbered for nearly a minute; whether about tarts or father, he could not have said. All the same, with an inflexibility of principle exactly like her own, he never asked for tarts again. Instead, aided by a friendly stableman, he took to setting traps in the woods, and thereby provided his mother and himself with an occasional and entirely honest rabbit stew.

It was about this time, as a result of "reasoning together," and also because he had a horrifying glimpse of his handsome father reeling through the library on his way to bed, singing,

"He shipped aboard a whaler,  
Renzo, boys, Renzo!"

—that Arthur signed the pledge. Even without the sight of that staggering figure, he was ready to be impressed by the evil of liquor because once, when he was a very little boy, his mother had taken him with her on the occasion of a certain ludicrous and

sublime expression of religious faith on the part of some True Followers. A group of devout men and women—Arthur's mother among them—knelt in the snow before the tavern, and, after singing a hymn, prayed aloud that God would convert Van Horn from the error of his ways. Never in all his life did Arthur Kay forget that gray January day in front of Old Chester's very respectable tavern, and his mother's white face, wincing and shrinking at the ordeal of publicity. Nor did he forget the implied reproof to his father. Of course this all meant that, instead of the birthright of every child,—boastful admiration for a father and unreasoning love for a mother,—Arthur had nothing but censure for one, and respect for the other; and the astonishing thing is that he was not, in consequence, insufferably priggish. But he wasn't. Perhaps because he was his father's son. Or perhaps because the usual rambunctious performances of a healthy boy left him no time for moral comparisons and those New England "I am holier than thou" implications. Nor did he recognize any significance in the presence of that big fat woman in the loft. He had occasional glimpses of her, trying to caress his mother's hair or playing with a doll or one of his own old toys; and often he heard her calling for flowers—"bouquet! bouquet!" He knew that his mother fed her and emptied her slops and sang "Lord Lovel" to her, and even occasionally washed her clothing or bed

linen. But he never knew that under the steady doing of what had to be done, Agnes Kay had moments of terror when the woman's big fumbling hands touched her. Once it did occur to the boy to ask, "Is Mary a relation of ours?"

"No."

"Just a friend?"

"No!"

Something in her voice made him say, wonderingly, "Don't you like Mary?"

"She once injured me."

"Then why do you take care of her?"

"I have forgiven her, so I must be just to her. She has a right to be here. That is enough for you to know." She had risen and was leaving the room, but she turned and came back: "Arthur, at first, when I—almost hated Mary, I kissed her. And served her. And then I stopped disliking her. I tell you this because I want you to know something: *If you are kind to an enemy, you cannot hate him.* So, if your enemy hunger, feed him. If he thirst, give him to drink."

"Then," said Arthur, "why don't you kiss Father?"

The blood rushed into her delicate face. "I do not hate your father!"

And Arthur said, quickly, with a sort of shy bluster of courage—and shame, too, for there was the

whisky bottle and the wicked lottery!—"Well, I like Father."

Dr. Lavendar said long afterward that she had the highest type of courage there is—she did what she was afraid to do. "I'm sure she's miserable in those queer petticoats," he said; "but she thinks it's right to look like a match, and I believe she'd die rather than put on hoops!" And he said that Major Kay had a child's heart, which feels but does not understand. Probably Dr. Lavendar, who knew how Agnes Kay felt without any hoops on, knew, too, what poor Kay meant when he used to say of beauty, or love, or lust, or valor—"the Holy Ghost". But nobody else knew; Old Chester just said he was profane, even as it said she was immodest. . . . It is only fair to speak thus frankly about Arthur Kay's parents because, as William King said once, "What can you expect of the boy? How on earth did two such different people marry?"

"Willy," said Dr. Lavendar, "I have noticed that every marriage is between different people."

William said well, yes, he supposed so. "But why did George Kay ever fall in love with her? I can see why she did with him—he's an attractive cuss, even if he does break the Third Commandment occasionally"—

"*Occasionally?*" said Dr. Lavendar.

"—and besides, every woman longs to reform a

rake. I sometimes wonder how good men ever get wives. But why he—"

"Probably the same fondness for taking chances that made Franklin start for the North Pole," said Dr. Lavendar; "but she was a lovely creature once."

"Yes, she was," said Willy; "and I don't know that he was any more of a gambler than any man who gets married—even if he does run a lottery now! They say he's made a fortune. Well, lucky at cards, unlucky in love. . . . Did you know that she was teaching Arthur Latin? Judge Morrison told me so, and he said, 'From a braying mule and a woman who talks Latin, good Lord deliver us'."

"Sounds like him," said Dr. Lavendar, dryly; "but as for Arthur and his father and mother, I am afraid it's a case of two dogs fighting for a bone. He is the bone."

"Which of 'em will get it?" said William King.

"I would bet," said Dr. Lavendar, "if I had Kay's card luck, on the under dog."

"But which *is* the under dog?" Willy said.

And Dr. Lavendar, in his provoking way, only said, "I'll tell you when I win my bet."

## Chapter Two

WHEN Arthur was about thirteen, shortly after he had taken the True Follower's Pledge to Peace, he and his father suddenly collided mentally as well as physically; but the mental collision had unfortunate results for them both. Major Kay, dressed in the height of fashion, with his hat cocked over one ear, swinging a gleaming Malacca cane, was swaggering home from the tavern one hot summer evening, glancing under the bonnet of any pretty woman he might pass, when his boy, running furiously, head on, hit him full in his flowered waistcoat and almost knocked him off his feet. The Major, laughing in spite of himself, collared him, saying: "Look out! What are you doing? Look where you're going! What's the matter?"

Arthur gasped out, "Harry Clark said I stole his ball—"

"Well, did you deny the allegation and defy the allegator?" his father said, much amused. "Huh?" said Arthur. "Did you tell him he lied?" "No," Arthur said, stamping with rage. "I was afraid to."

"You were *what?*"

"Afraid," Arthur said, scowling and snuffing; "'cause then he might 'a' fought, for I'd 'a' told

him he was a red-headed devil pig liar, an' it might 'a' made him mad."

"It would be calculated to," the Major admitted.

"So then I ran away."

"Ran away!"

"Yes," Arthur said, impatiently. "I've just been tellin' you! I'd 'a' had to fight, if I'd stayed."

George Kay looked at the handsome, angry child, his lips parting with disgusted amazement. "Afraid to fight?" he said. "Get out of my way!" He swished his cane across Arthur's breeches and walked off up the road. "She was right," he said; "he *is* her son. I want no part of him. A coward!"

This was the result of the collision to the father. The result to the son was the puzzling discovery that grown people don't always agree. If your mother teaches you that it is only dogs who delight to bark and bite, and your father switches you because you have with infinite effort refrained from such delight, you are naturally bewildered.

On top of this bewilderment there happened to Arthur Kay one of those juvenile experiences which sometimes decide adult life. It started in nothing more important than mortification because of his shabby and outgrown overcoat. But it turned him from the simplicity of friendly candor to a reticence which would not explain or appeal. Probably his way of rationalizing about everything and standing by his deductions inclined him to reticence, anyhow,



because it irritated the other children, who, when he said, "Why?" were reduced (because they had no idea "why") to "Aw, get out!" as a repartee—which did not encourage confidences on his part or intimacies on their part. Yet, in spite of this beginning of intellectual loneliness, until the shabby coat became a factor in his life, Arthur had been like other youngsters. The loft, and no tarts, and long sermons in the True Followers' chapel, and even embarrassment because his mother didn't dress like other boys' mothers (it is dreadfully hard for a boy to have a reformer for a mother!)—all these things left his obstinate, quick-tempered humanness unspoiled. At school he stole apples as cleverly as anybody else, and he early practised the art of spit-balls when his teacher wasn't looking; at home he tormented Betsey and Jane, and dropped his clothes about on the floor, and smoked dried ailanthus twigs, choosing secret places in which to commit this crime. Once he hid beneath his mother's bed, and when, betrayed by wisps of smoke curling up from under the valance, he was dragged out for punishment, he sulked for a whole day, before a promise not to do it again could be extracted from him. When at last he did promise, it was with a stubborn mutter, "Father smokes." As for temper, when Harry Clark teased Rover, Arthur poured ink all over Harry's neat copybook (for which, to be sure, his religion compelled him, later, to apologize.

"But I spoiled his copybook!" he thought, with satisfaction). Also, although he had, under the wordless pressure of his mother's expectation, taken the True Follower's Pledge for Peace, he knocked Fatty Buttrick's front tooth out when Fatty bothered Lois by trying to hug her! All of which goes to show that he was in no danger of dying young from excess of virtue, and that he differed from other Old Chester boys only because he was given to reasoning and they were not.

It was his reasoning about that coat, with sleeves that didn't cover his wrists, which drove him, during his first year at the Seminary for Youths in Upper Chester, into an occupation despised by his sex, and brought down upon him an avalanche of tormenting ridicule. It began with his desire to earn money to buy a new coat. Accordingly he set his traps in the woods and made very good bargains for his squirrel skins—entirely indifferent to Lois' dismay when she saw blood on soft white breasts. "It hurts 'em," said Lois; "an' maybe God likes rabbits as much as he likes us?" "I bet he don't," said Arthur, and graciously permitted the Clark boys to help him with the traps. Big Bobby Buttrick, who wouldn't risk pinching his fingers in the springs because, he said, "it made him sick to his stummick" to get pinched—begged to do the nice bloody work of skinning. Besides the fur business, Arthur also ran errands and mowed lawns; in fact, he did all the things an

American boy, working his way through school or college, would be apt to do—and he never told anybody why he did them. (Again the reticence which was to become such a factor in his character!) But pennies came in very slowly. So, after counting the nickels in his little black iron savings bank, he announced: "I'll darn any fellow's socks for him, if he'll pay me fifteen cents a week." ("If," he told himself with the excitement of foreseeing a financial coup, "I can get ten of 'em to gimme their socks, I can buy a coat by Christmas!")

Well, of course the inevitable happened. A few boys gave him some terribly holey stockings; the others intelligently preferred to save money and take their socks home to their mothers. But the two or three mothers who discovered, with amazement, their work done for them, made inquiries, and so Arthur's industry became known in Old Chester. Some people laughed at him; some pitied him; all criticized his parents. How queer that the Kays, rich as they were, didn't give their son any pocket money! Mrs. Buttrick said that though she thought lotteries wicked—and that the drawings were often dishonestly conducted, she knew, for she had had several unlucky numbers herself!—all the same, she couldn't understand why the Major didn't give Arthur a proper allowance! "Of course *she's* always been queer," said Mrs. Butterick. "They say she believes in women's rights!"

"Oh no!" Mrs. Clark protested, shocked; "Mrs. Kay is eccentric, but she's *perfectly* respectable."

Mrs. Buttrick shook her head. "Well, I'm sure I hope so; but they say she says there's no hell, so she must be an infidel. And *I* believe it's true about her hemming napkins on Sunday. And look at her dress! Immodest, *I* call it. Now me, 'course, I always take off my hoops in a thunderstorm; but I'd die rather than go on the street that way, and have gentlemen see me. As for Arthur's having to sew to make a dime—I don't wonder they call him 'Sissy'!—it bears out what her servants say about her cheese-paring; though probably he's just nach'erly close. And he has an awful temper—think of my poor darling boy's tooth!"

Mrs. Clark replied coldly that she was not in the habit of talking to Mrs. Kay's servants. Ellen was a dear, warm-hearted, unreasoning creature, who always made you think of a damask rose in the sun, but she had her thorns. "I can't stand that Buttrick person!" she used to say; "she's a green apple with a worm in it." All the same, she agreed with Mrs. Buttrick that too great a desire to make money was not a pleasing trait in a young person.

"My Bob would just nach'erly die before he'd touch a needle," said Mrs. Buttrick; "and he'd smack any boy's mouth who called him 'Sissy.' "

Pretty soon everybody was calling Arthur Kay "Sissy," and nobody's mouth was smacked. All

Arthur said, contemptuously, was, "What do I care?"—an abbreviation of his mother's precept, "What people think is of no importance." At first this was probably affectation—just a way of hiding his misery. But it wasn't all affectation; he really had individuality—which is a willingness to be different. Doubtless his deepening consciousness of his mother's eccentricities had forced him into individuality as a sort of self-defense; but be that as it may, he hung on to his scheme as long as even one boy gave him a pair of holey socks. At first he quoted: "'Let us reason together.' Why," he blustered, "is it worse for a boy to put a needle into a sock than a nail into a piece of wood?" As usual, none of the boys could say why, so they said, "Aw, get out, Sissy!" and skinned him alive. As a result he occasionally ran back into the woods and lay down on his face, and pounded his toes into the earth and said "Doggone 'em! Doggone 'em! Doggone 'em!"

As most of the boys whose socks had been darned forgot to pay for them, he very soon went out of business. But Old Chester kept on buzzing about his Miss Nancyish ways. Lois, of course, stood up for him—for which Tom and Harry teased her unmercifully; even her beloved Emma said, "What on *airth* is a boy doin', sewin'?" In Emma's experience—based on stories in the *New York Ledger*—young gentlemen did many wonderful things, but they never

sewed! Mrs. Clark expressed her opinion, too: "It isn't nice, honey, for Arthur to be so anxious for money that he will do unmanly things to earn it! I'm afraid he's mercenary. And why doesn't he knock any boy down who calls him 'Sissy'?"

"He says it wouldn't be Christian," Lois defended him.

"What nonsense!" said her mother. Later she told Old Chester that it was too bad Mrs. Kay was making a mollycoddle of Arthur. "That's the worst of these fancy religions," said Ellen; "they make people queer. Now I'm religious, of course—I hardly ever miss a morning service; but I am *not* queer!"

Bobby Buttrick, preoccupied with the hope of whiskers and beginning to think about girls, said what he thought of Arthur: "You wouldn't catch *me* darning socks! I don't see why you like him so much, Lois."

But Lois, who didn't like Bobby—she said he was fat and smelt of stale cake crumbs—gave no reason for liking Arthur. Lois, who had shed her little bright tears for baby crocodiles, and whose friendliness was as reliable and indiscriminating as sunshine, never reasoned. She just loved. And defended! When Bobby raked up the old slur about Arthur's hiding in the cellar when he was a little boy, "for fear the thunder would kill him," Lois retorted:

"It was cool in the cellar!—and Rover was



scared." And supposin' Arthur *had* 'pologized for pouring ink all over Harry's copybook, well, that too was because it was Christian to say he was sorry. "In his church you have to ask to be forgiven, and pray for people who spitefully prosecute you," Lois said, hotly. As for the sewing itself, she had only the old reminder: "If it isn't in the Ten Commandments that it's wrong for a boy to sew—then it isn't!" There was no end to the little thing's passionate, unreasoning tenderness of defense. But once she did betray to Arthur her bewilderment that defense was necessary. She and he and Rover were spending a rainy afternoon in the old carriage-house, so Lois could make dresses for her paper dolls without having Emma say, "What on *airth* are you doin'? daubin' paste all over ever'thin'!"—and Lois took the opportunity to tell Arthur (who was dreadfully bored by the paper dolls) how the boys had laughed at him. "And I said, 'I'll hit you, if you say those things 'bout Arthur!'"

Instantly he was as red and angry as a turkey-cock. "Let 'em laugh! I don't care. Bobby says I'm ladylike, does he, an' that I'm afraid of thunder? All right; I am. I'm a lady! And I'm afraid of a dewdrop, if Fatty Buttrick says so." His elaborate sarcasm was lost on Lois's literalness; Arthur said he was afraid, so she supposed he was. "An' I can tell you another thing," he boasted; "I knew enough, even when I was seven, to know that

it wasn't thunder that killed people; it was lightning."

"Oh, I'm *sure* you'll never get struck!" she encouraged him. "But why don't you lick Bobby?"

"'Cause when I joined the church I took the Pledge to Peace, so I can't fight," he said, gloomily; "and as for not getting struck by lightning, you can't be sure; I might be." (He had to be reasonable!) But he didn't say anything more. His bruised pride forbade it, though he would have just liked to mention that he intended some day to be a pirate; then they'd know he wasn't a coward! "But Lois knows I'm not," he comforted himself.

In point of fact, she didn't know anything of the kind. His statement that he might be struck merely confirmed her opinion that he was afraid. As for the sewing, she didn't like to ask him why he had done it; and he didn't tell her. But, except for Lois, Old Chester continued to call him—long after the appropriateness of the epithets had ceased—either Sissy or Socks.

And by and by the nickname reached George Kay's ears. It appears that, driving home one evening, he had drawn up in the winter dusk at the tavern. He threw the reins over on to the back of his Kentucky mare, Good Girl, and came loitering in to the bar for a hot drink—the prayers of the True Followers had not perceptibly lessened Van Horn's business! His patrons, of whom there were half a

dozen leaning on the counter or sitting about the stove, were delighted to see the Major, because he always "ordered up"; so very soon everybody was cheerful—especially George Kay; until some one ventured a tipsy familiarity:

"That boy of yours, Beau Kay, they say he earns pocket money by darnin' socks for the whole seminary,"—the Major looked at him over the rim of his whisky tumbler, but said nothing. "They call him 'Sissy,' and he won't fight 'em, 'cause he's too pious."

Kay, smiling, strolled across the room and threw the contents of his glass in the man's face. "You lie, sir," he said, "and you will apologize, or—" Then, lightly, without giving his son's defamer a chance to speak, his fist caught him under the chin. "I, fortunately, am not pious," he said, looking at the astonished man sprawling on the floor. Then he flung the door open with a bang, and while Van Horn, running to his customer's assistance was remonstrating, "It's so, Major!" he disappeared, still smiling, into the dusk. But his hands, fumbling with Good Girl's hitching strap, trembled with irritation. "I don't believe the swine did lie. Van Horn knows. I'm ashamed to look those loafers in the face. My son, *sewing*, to earn ten cents!" Then he remembered the evening Arthur had run away from a fight,—“they called him a thief, and he didn't punch their noses! He *is* a sissy,” he said, and

slapped a vicious rein down on the mare's back. "I'll have this out with Agnes. I'll tell her I won't have mynamemade the laughing-stock of a lot of toppers!"

At his own house, before having it out, he got an apple for the mare. "Sorry I slapped you, Girl," he said, and stroked her velvet nose. Then he looked into the chilly, rarely used parlor for his wife; not finding her, rushed upstairs, knocked at her door; had no reply; pushed the door open—an intimacy unknown to him since Arthur's birth; found the room, in its immaculate lack of luxury, empty; hesitated—listened. . . . Probably she was in the garret? Why, in Heaven's name, did she sit up there? She was as crazy as the crazy friend she saw fit to keep in the ell chamber! He hurried up to the third story—where were the confounded attic stairs, anyway?—he saw a closed door, opened it, ran up the twisting flight of three-cornered steps, and looked into the loft. She was there, with Rover at her feet, sitting by a table close to the soapstone stove. She had evidently been writing, for there were sheets of paper before her, and an open Bible; the light of a kerosene lamp made a faint halo about her head. Her face was the face of vanished loveliness and unimaginative goodness. She looked up, and a little twisting vein began to hammer in her temple; she glanced over her shoulder apprehensively at a door halfway down the loft, but she

didn't speak. He did all the speaking, his gesticulating shadow lurching among the rafters.

"I hope I am not interrupting you?" His voice had the elaborate politeness of restrained anger.

"No."

"I merely wish to speak to you about Arthur. Your unwillingness to live on my money—because I, like George Washington and a few other gentlemen with whom, I suppose, you would have been unwilling to associate, approve of certain respectable institutions called lotteries—your aversion to my money, which you have instilled into the boy, is injuring his reputation in this town."

She made no reply.

"You think it is dishonest money—"

"I do," she said.

"Well! You can despise the food it pays for, and eat dry bread if you want to. And you can prevent the boy from eating my food, too. I've seen him half starved at my own table. (Yet I—I took the cake out of his mouth once, to keep him from breaking his word to you on this food business!) But never mind that. I haven't interfered. You'll bear me out on that? I haven't interfered! You said I had forfeited my right to him, because of—of a matter with which a refined female had no concern. Well, I gave up my rights; I never said my say. Now I'm going to!—for the dignity of my name and because he has rights, too. The right to be a

*man!* They're calling him 'Sissy' at the seminary because he's darning stockings to earn a dollar!"

She looked down at her Bible, then lifted her pencil and tapped her paper, as if ready, as soon as this foolish noise ceased, to go on with her calculations upon the second coming of Christ. The contempt of her self-control was too much for him; the leash of politeness snapped.

"Say something!" he said, and struck his fist on the table so that she caught at the swaying lamp. She looked at him, her grave sad eyes narrowing:

"If I should, could you understand?"

"I'm not generally accounted a fool!"

But she shook her head. "I have nothing to say except that you are drunk and had better go to bed."

"I'm not drunk. Lord! A woman of your experience, not to know whether a gentleman's drunk or not!" He threw a handful of bills down in front of her. "Send Arthur this money to-morrow. You've made the boy a complacent coward—I caught him once running away from a fight. Why, I, when I was hardly nineteen, fought a duel with a bully twice my age, because he insulted my angel mother!"

"He did it when he was drunk," she reminded him, coldly, "and you killed him! Would you boast of having killed a child?"

He did not answer the caustic question: "A complacent coward is the most abominable combination



on earth—except a mercenary sissy! If he's that too, I'll wring his neck."

She was silent; but she looked uneasily at the closed door—there were whimpering sounds; Mary must be waking up!

"I am responsible for him," Kay said, "even if I have no right to him. Oh, I admit it—I admit it! I'm not arguing about *that*!"

"My son would not use your money."

"'Your' son? I was under the impression that he was *my* son, also? Of course, if I am mistaken —" Her look of wondering disgust was without words; but none were needed; he was ashamed. "I beg your pardon! I didn't mean that. I'm a fool when I get mad. But I want to tell you something: that boy's got my blood in him, as well as yours. You'll find it out one of these days! He may never go to the devil, but because he's my son he's capable of it—thank God!"

He must have touched the quick, for she sprang up, her thin face suddenly haughty with the old icy loveliness so long ago covered by the ashes of disillusionment and fatigue. Her anger leaped to meet his! "Very well. I will speak!—and you shall listen. He will *not* go to the devil. Just because he has your blood in him, I have—agonized to make him righteous. I have made him realize that your money is evil money. That if he used it he would be corrupted by receiving riches for which no honest

labor had been given—for only by the sweat of his brow ought a man to eat bread! Better—far better!—that he should starve, than eat stolen bread. For these winnings”, she flicked the bills from the Bible to the floor; “these filthy winnings—the losses of others—are not yours. They belong to men whom you tempted to get gain without labor; and when they fell into temptation, you profited—as any pickpocket profits. Thus saith the Lord, *‘Thou shalt not steal.’*”

George Kay’s face as he listened changed from fury to amusement—to pity. When she ended, all her cold beauty sinking into the colder ashes of contempt and leaving her face haggard to the point of plainness, there was a moment’s silence; then suddenly he laughed. “Agnes,” he said, “do you know? I’m sorry for you. You are righteous overmuch. You see, you are not the only person who can quote scripture!” He turned on his heel, but just as he started down the twisted steps there was a cry from the ell room, a loud, long cry—a cry of terror and of love: only a word—“*Kay?*” He looked back, startled.

“She is calling my name,” his wife said. “Go, please.”

He went; but he set his teeth as he plunged angrily down stairs. In spite of his sarcasm and bluster, she had got the better of him, though how she did it he never knew. Certainly it was by no

unfair femininity; she could always easily have conquered him by tears, but he had never seen her weep. Yet now, as usual, she had made him feel like a fool! . . . Mrs. Kay, waiting only to hear the door at the foot of the garret steps close, went quickly into Mary's room. "Quiet Mary, quiet," she said. The woman stretched out her fat arms, saying: "Frightened! Frightened!"

"Don't be frightened. No one shall hurt you."

"Take care of me—"

"Yes, I will take care of you."

The big woman, whimpering, lay down, and Agnes Kay, sitting beside her, resigned her reluctant hand to mumbling kisses, until, soothed, Mary reached up, with snickering laughter, and tangled her caressing fingers in the hair looping so meekly over Mrs. Kay's ears. Again and again the hands were drawn away, always with the same patient words: "Stop, Mary. You hurt me." Once, wincing at a feeble, loving tug, she said, "I'll have to cut my hair off, Mary, if you do that." But there was another pull, so she began, wearily, to sing:

"Lord Lovel he stood at his castle gate,  
Combing his milk-white steed . . ."

As she sang, anger at her husband ebbed. Why be angry? It was as irrational to be angry at him, drunk with temper, as it was for him to have fought that duel with a man drunk with liquor. But as

reason blotted out her anger, exultation in Arthur's rectitude flooded in upon her. She knew, because he had told her, that he was setting his traps and selling his rabbit skins to earn money to buy a coat; but he had said nothing of the mending, nor of how he was being treated at school. She didn't miss the intimacy of such confidences, because she had never had it. So now, instead of being hurt at his reticence, she said to herself, proudly, that he was standing against the evil thing. Even though she had little imagination and no humor, she knew what it meant, to a boy, to *sew*. She had intended to buy him a coat that very week. She had managed, somehow, to scrape up the money. But now she wouldn't. It was better for him to get it himself, in this stoic way.

Of course Arthur never got his father's money, flung down on those calculations upon the second coming of Christ (the Major found it in his library the next morning); but he was told that it had been offered. That seemed to Agnes Kay only just. . . . Arthur had come home from the seminary to spend Sunday, and was waiting in his room (rather nervously) to speak to his mother as she came from the loft. He had something to tell her, and he wanted to get it over as quickly as possible! He had to wait a good while, which made him say, when she came down the attic steps, "I hate all this Mary business!"

"It is tiresome," she admitted; then, smoothing her hair, loosened by Mary's fingers, she said: "I am almost tempted to cut my hair, she pulls it so. I am not always patient, I am afraid—poor Mary."

"Mother! Don't!" he protested. For years the boy had had goose flesh whenever he saw anyone glance at his mother's narrow petticoats—but short hair, too! *That* would be unendurable. Really, considering the sufferings of youth when a mother doesn't behave like other mothers, it seems as if the feminine idealist ought to be childless. "Short hair isn't fashionable!" Arthur said, desperately.

She looked at him with real disappointment. "Arthur, that makes me ashamed of you. Let us reason together: If Mary hurts me by pulling my hair, wouldn't it be common sense (if I can't stop her) to wear it short? To wear it long may be what you call fashionable; but what childish cowardice, to be uncomfortable because of fashion!"

The subject thus dismissed, and her hair sleek again over her ears, Mrs. Kay told him, with careful accuracy, the story of his father's offer of money. Arthur's reply was as laconic as her statement, "Don't want it!"—and the little throbbing vein in her temple quieted.

There was no further reference to the matter, so Arthur had his chance to stammer out what he had been waiting to say: "I just thought I'd tell you. . . . I've smoked."

"I am sorry."

"The twins have smoked for a year," he blustered.

"That is their affair."

"Well, ah—may I?"

"That will be, later on, a matter for your own conscience. As you know, smoking, because it is sensual and selfish and unclean, is against an ordinance of our faith. I hope you will not yield to these things. But until you are older, and wise enough to decide for yourself, I must decide for you and forbid it."

She waited. He mumbled, "A'right." When she left him he sat on the edge of his bed, the dimple in his cheek lengthening into a line of sulky misery. "I've a great mind to go to Africa as a missionary," he told himself, "or else I'll join a circus. And I bet I'll smoke when I'm sixteen! I haven't signed the pledge not to," he thought with satisfaction. The parental authority of the 'fifties and 'sixties is unbelievable now. But at fourteen the habit of obedience to such authority—relieved only by thoughts of foreign missions and circuses—held Arthur Kay to his "a' right." And his dogged individuality held him to his purpose of earning money to buy a coat. But as the unprofitable socks business had long ago ceased, he just pinned newspapers inside his waistcoat on very cold days, and followed the usual juvenile methods of getting



pocket money—running errands, and such things. But the tormenting which the socks had inspired did not cease. Baby-bottles full of milk continued to appear on his desk; a hoop skirt tied in a figure eight was left at his door; the Clark twins yelled, "Lady!" at him. And his conspicuous obedience to his mother's command as to smoking brought new miseries; anonymous stogies were crumbled up in his bed, and cigar smoke was puffed into his face upon every furtive opportunity. . . . Of course, a good, honest fight and some bloody noses and black eyes would have stopped the whole thing; but Arthur, bursting with silent rage, held to his Pledge to Peace and his promise to his mother—and in February he bought his coat! But all the while the fox gnawed at his vitals, and he hid the pain of it under a deepening reticence which later was to become the almost unbreakable habit of his mind. In matters personal to himself he was dumb; but below the dumbness he was saying, "I don't care; doggone 'em!" Which balm upon the smarting surface of self-consciousness was, of course, nothing more than his father's "twopenny damn." During the whole experience, he never told Lois of his unhappiness. He just said to himself, "*She* knows I'm not a sissy!"

It was when the mending business had been bankrupt for a year that Arthur believed that his father, too, knew he wasn't a sissy. . . . It seems that the Major, brooding over the fact that his son had not

the gizzard to beat the dirty little beasts who called him "Sissy," black and blue,—and remembering how he had caught him running away from a fight, and even in his dismay distrusting that explanation of Rover and the cellar—said to himself, grimly: "He's a coward. I reckon that's at the bottom of it. But sometime, when I get the chance, I'll tell him that, so far as his pocket money is concerned, he needn't protect *me*. He can damn lotteries from the housetops if he wants to!" The chance to do this came one morning when, on his way to the dining-room, he saw his son just going out of the front door. "Hold on!" he called to him. "I want to speak to you." Beau Kay had been drunk the night before. He was bloated and purple; the points of his dicky above his black stock showed white against his blue, unshaven chin, and his beautiful dark eyes were bloodshot; he looked forlorn and disheveled, and he thought of his breakfast with qualms. He was not an attractive father; and of course, considering his sins, not a father to be proud of. Yet in spite of the lottery and the whisky bottle, Arthur never saw him without a stir of the old puppy-worship. And, curiously enough, his father's badness never mortified him, as did his mother's goodness.

Kay, looking at the handsome, embarrassed boy standing in the hall, shifting from one foot to the other in a desire to escape, said to himself, sardonically, "I'll tell him I consider him as brave as a lion!

Perhaps that will put a gizzard into him and cure his cowardice." . . . "Look, here, youngster," he said, good-humoredly, "I know why you do a lot of Tomfool things to get pocket money."

Arthur stammered something like: "Don't know what you mean."

"Yes, you do! Of course you do. Those—socks. I tell you, I know why you do it."

"I don't, *now!*" Arthur said.

"You ought never to have done it!" the Major said sternly. "But damn it, why didn't you give any son of a gun who called you 'Sissy,' a black eye?"

"I don't fight," Arthur said, very low.

"I know you don't;" Kay could not keep contempt out of his voice. "I saw you run away from a fight, once." Then, suddenly remembering his cure for cowardice, he added, "but that means you'll 'live to fight another day'! You're not afraid now."

Arthur, glowering at him, thought, "I've a great mind to say *I am.*"

"No!" the Major fibbed, heartily, "I know you're not! No son of mine could be a coward. You're just" (he was warming to his task of creating a gizzard) "a Sunday-school, love-one-another idiot; and you'll get over that if, whenever you see a fight, you jump into it! You can find out what it's about afterward." His voice was friendly and understanding. "I heard that you spoiled Buttrick's

beauty and made him swallow his front teeth. That's hopeful."

"Well," Arthur admitted, uneasily, "only one tooth; and he was bothering Lois—to hug her. So I—"

"Bully for you!" said his father. "Knock any man's head off who makes love to a lady—against her will. Yes, you're all right. You *can* get mad!" Arthur grinned (he did not mention the True Follower's vow never to let the sun go down upon wrath and always to ask for forgiveness). "But about those socks: tell the truth! Say you did it because you think lottery tickets are"—George Kay chuckled—"the hot burning coals on the altar of Moloch." "

Poor Arthur, recognizing a True Follower phrase, blushed.

"Now, my boy, I want to tell you something; you can't escape that altar. Life is a lottery. So is love—my God! especially love. So is planting oats; so is eating your dinner—it may give you mollygrubs. No, sir! To give up gambling, *entirely*, you'll have to give up breathing. The thing to do is to gamble honestly. That's how my business is conducted—honestly! And it's as good a business as any stock broker's, or farmer's, or shoemaker's, this side of hell. Also, remember this: A coward wants to keep what money he has—just as he wants to keep a whole skin; so a coward

doesn't take chances. A gentleman does! That's why gambling is a gentleman's game. Considering that, don't you think that if Thomas Jefferson approved of a lottery, and if in your Yankee grandfather's day Harvard College operated one; and if, now, various judges and ministers and army officers whom I could name to you are blowing on those hot coals it is hardly worth while for a squirt like you to set up your Ebenezer and say lotteries are wrong? But I'd rather have people think you a squirt than a poltroon, for"—the Major really didn't like to lie, even as a cure for cowardice, but he got it out—"for you're not!"

Arthur gave him an eager look, but the habit of reticence held him silent. He just stood there, his big, freckled hand—a rather beautiful hand, and sensitive, like his father's—on the door knob, and grinned, and ground his heel into the carpet. His father's defense of the lottery did not shake his convictions in the slightest degree; he knew it was an evil business; but all the same, something warm and happy stirred in his heart. "Father's bully!" he thought.

"You're a man," the Major said, hammering his cure in; "why, you have the making of a soldier in you." (Arthur, remembering his Pledge to Peace, laughed rather doubtfully.) "You held that sword as if it was a girl's hand! And as for your sissy-missy sewing" (Arthur's grin died), "tell people you

did it because you didn't want to use your father's ill-gotten gains"; the Major chuckled; "that'll stop 'em talking about you and start 'em talking about *me*—and be damned to them! My skin is thick." He clapped his son on the shoulder and started toward the dining-room; "I'll fib a gizzard into him!" he was thinking—and something warm and happy stirred in his heart, too. He had not supposed that he had a particle of feeling for the self-righteous cub, who was "hers"; yet suddenly he knew that he was pleased because he could help the youngster to other things than righteousness! If only at this moment the boy had held his tongue, a real friendship might have begun between these two. But a type of courage which George Kay could not possibly understand made Arthur, just starting out of the door, red with pleasure, turn back and say, awkwardly:

"I *do* think Mother is right about the lottery, sir."

It was the same mettle in him which had made him, when a little boy, brave his mother's annoyance and say that he "liked Father." George Kay was affected by it now exactly as his wife had been then. But he only said, sharply, "Clear out!" Nevertheless, he could not tear the boy out of his mind. "She taught him that stuff," he thought; "but he's *my* son! I believe he's only a skin-deep coward, and the devil will save him yet!"



But the worst of it was that other people didn't recognize Arthur's saving devil; they thought he was pious. "I'm pious myself, on Sundays," Kay thought, in honest simplicity; "but it isn't healthy for a boy to be." It occurred to him that he might tell people that Arthur really wasn't pious at all; he was a *bad* boy! Only, unfortunately, he had no proof to offer except Fatty Buttrick's tooth. "Still, I can say I'm afraid he's inclined to be wild. Yes," he promised himself, sardonically "I'll give him a bad name if I get the chance." It was his first thrill of fatherly responsibility.

The chance to give Arthur a bad name came a day or two later when he met Ellen Clark ("Tell one woman and tell her not to tell, and you tell twenty!" he reminded himself.) He didn't know Mrs. Clark very well, but he liked her, perhaps because she had been such an arrant flirt before Ben Clark carried her off from more beaux than you could shake a stick at! And no wonder she had beaux. With her glorious laugh, and her bright hot color, she was to any man who crossed her path what a ripe peach in the sunshine is to a bee. And she had made men of her two boys; *they* were ready to fight! Harry always had a chip on his shoulder. Tommy, to be sure, was a little too fond of the tavern for his sixteen years; but at least he didn't darn stockings! Then he remembered that Arthur only knew the tavern from the *outside*—"saying his prayers with a lot of females,"



the Major thought, disgustedly. He wished he could tell Mrs. Clark that he would be glad to have his son as drunk as hers, once in a while. But perhaps a lady wouldn't quite understand his feelings? . . . He had been thinking about Arthur's unmanly virtues one blazing August morning, when some neighborly errand took Lois Clark's mother over to the Kay house. On her way through the garden, her wide pink calico skirts ballooning against the box borders, she caught sight of the Major sauntering along ahead of her, his hands in his pockets, humming:

"Oh, Buffalo girls,  
Are you coming out to-night,  
Are you coming out to-night,  
To dance by the light of the moon—"

He stopped abruptly; a turn in the path had brought him to a lattice covered from the ground up with a shimmer of blue morning-glories. Heavenly blue they were, and rimmed and beaded with dew, and the sun shone through them. George Kay stood stock-still, with parted lips; then, exactly as if he was in the presence of something holy, he raised his hat and bent his head. His emotion flowed back to her. They were both silent until she said, "How beautiful!"

Kay, turning sharply, gave her a quick look; then he must have thought she was amused at that lifted

hat, for he shrugged his shoulders, put his hat on, and said something about morning-glories being like some pretty women—"Can't stand high noon," he said, and bowing, strolled past her, humming:

"She would dance all night  
With a hole in her stocking  
While her heel kept a-rocking,  
While her heel kept a—"

He turned and came back to her. "Mrs. Clark," he said, "your Tom and Harry are fine youngsters."

She said, her gay dark eyes crinkling into laughter, that she was glad he thought so; then, ruefully: "Their manners might be better."

"Their manners are good enough! Nobody wants boys to be tatting-and-canary-bird young ladies. I don't, anyhow. My own boy—he isn't a young lady, either. I—I've heard him swear like a trooper." (Arthur would not have recognized his manly "doggone.") "Bad habit, swearing," George Kay said. "And he got into a mess with young Buttrick—I think Buttrick wanted to kiss your Lois? Not that I blame him—her mother set her the example of breaking hearts!—though the Little Dear's heart is as soft as silk." He paused to tell Mrs. Clark the tender, pretty story of the baby crocodiles. "She wept over the devilish things if you please!—because they'd lost their mother."

Ellen Clark, much amused, capped his tale: "Yes,

she's very tender hearted. Once, when I was hearing her say her prayers, I almost laughed out loud, because she said 'please, Jesus, don't let poor Mr. Satan get blisters.'"

George Kay shouted with delight. "You must look out, or she'll marry a man to keep from hurting his feelings! Well, Arthur's disposition is not, I am afraid, so lovely. He has the devil of a temper; he very properly knocked Buttrick's front teeth out. He is always blue-molding for a fight, and (I shouldn't want this known, of course; I just mention it in confidence to you) he's inclined to be wild, I'm afraid. Well, these are queer times we live in. Boys were better behaved in my day—or your good husband's day. But I just want to say, Arthur is by no means a young lady!"

Ellen, with "Sissy" echoing in her ears, said, courageously, "I'm sure he isn't!" ("I'd have told any fib to help him out," she said afterward.)

"Mrs. Clark," Kay said, "I want to tell you something; my boy—well, he took it into his head to earn money at the seminary. It appears he didn't approve of a lottery. That's my business, you know, madam, and I'm proud of it! In fact, so long as there is seed-time and harvest on this terrestrial ball, we'll have to admit that the Eternal himself runs a lottery! But Arthur thinks it's wrong, if you please! So he took to—to—to sewing"—poor Beau Kay was apoplectic over the horrid word, "to

avoid spending my money. He was an ass; and of course he's got all over it now! But he's not a sap-head or a sissy." (For the moment he believed what he said.)

"I'm sure he isn't!" Ellen politely lied again.

"For myself, I don't give a twopenny damn for anybody's opinion of me, but I don't want the boy misjudged. So you have my authorization, Mrs. Clark"—he smiled in his charming way—"to tell anybody who says my son is a sissy, to—if you'll forgive the phrase!—go to hell."

Ellen laughed.

"As for the morning-glories," Kay said, his big black eyes suddenly reverent, "*they* are certainly the Holy Ghost!"

And before Mrs. Clark, horrified, could think of anything to say, he made her a profound bow and strolled off, humming,

"We'll dance by the light of the moon."

So much for the bending of the twig. Arthur, at seven, sitting on a trunk up in the loft—which might be suffocatingly hot or freezing cold—studying his lessons, sewing clumsily as a game, or later to "help Mother"; ready to reason through the keyhole in his high, childish treble to poor whining Mary, "Be quiet; nothing'll hurt you!" . . . Or Arthur, silently eating bread and butter and looking with longing eyes at "damnation tarts," was the same Arthur who

ran away from the temptation to fight, and prayed in front of Van Horn's bar, and decided that, in regard to his methods of earning money, "people might think what they pleased." He was the same Arthur who, at sixteen, acutely mortified at his mother's peculiarities, yet unable to refute her sober logic, and pondering her unexplained and patient years in the loft, suddenly asked her a straight question: "Who is Mary, anyway? Why do we take care of her?"

Agnes Kay was silent for a long moment; then she said, "She has a right to the shelter of your father's house."

Their eyes met. Arthur turned very red. He said, violently, "I don't believe it's right to be as good as that!"

"I have forgiven her," she said; "so I must be just. She ought to be here."

He was the same disillusioned Arthur, rationalizing about everything, and growing more and more bitter and reticent, with whom, when she was sixteen and he eighteen, Lois Clark fell in love.

The story of Arthur and Lois really begins on April 12, 1861.

Sumter was fired upon.

Of course there had been wild talk, and anxious talk, for months before that. People had disagreed with one another, and disapproved of one another,

and united only in denouncing the Democrats. There had been abuse of Abraham Lincoln for "dallying with the South," and praise of him as a man solemnly conscious of the responsibilities of his office; and every day somebody prophesied a new thing. Arthur Kay's mother, who was known to be a Democrat, neither abused nor praised nor prophesied. And she said only one thing—War is murder.

Remembering now what that lonely woman, with the timid voice, in "immodest" petticoats, and with short hair—this was the most recent shock of her individuality, and it had especially affronted Old Chester's taste!—remembering what Agnes Kay is reported to have said about war, in the abstract—one is impressed, not only by her courage, but by her modernness. Probably she had always been modern, because she was a born rebel. When she was a young woman she had refused to bear children to a man she believed to be bad—a commonplace of morality now among intelligent people, but indecent undutifulness then. She had publicly and prayerfully denounced the trade of selling liquor in days when it was as reputable (provided one sold *enough* of it!) as the trade of selling Bibles. She had recognized the evil of her husband's business and refused to eat his bread—this two generations before the words "tainted money" had ever been spoken! So now, in 1861, she lighted her little smoky torch of idealism and ran ahead of every



tradition of her environment—for that matter, of human nature itself: she denounced the glory of war!—and Old Chester said she was a sentimental and disloyal fool. To be sure, the future was to make some of her other foolishnesses wisdom; but at the time, the smoke from her torch merely made people's eyes sting, and she was angrily disliked. Such dislike was not peculiar to Old Chester. Reformers are never pleasant to live with; they often offend good taste—probably the voice of John the Baptist was raucous—and they generally wear the blinders of entire consecration so that they are honestly unable to see side issues. Besides, the egotism of idealism is not only tiring, it is antagonizing, because it is a criticism of everybody who doesn't agree with the idealist. Even Arthur, whose logical mind generally agreed with Agnes Kay's, found her at times antagonizing; which must have been the reason that, though he entirely respected her he never really loved her. Nobody loved her except Mary, and the negroes whom she helped north, and Rover. They did, for with all her diamond hardness of reason, she had certain incredible softnesses; the softness of sitting in the cellar with Rover in thunderstorms, and, as he got elderly and asthmatic and panted over the stairs, carrying the heavy old dog in her arms up to the loft, because, if left alone he whined. The softness of deference, which made her eat with those fleeing negroes. The softness of patient years

of singing to the imbecile woman, and at last of cutting off her hair—her long, shining hair!—so that the poor creature might stroke her head without tangling her fingers in the looping silken locks; the softness, in the last year or two, of leaving her own high white bed in the stately room downstairs, and sleeping on a cot outside Mary's door, because the woman had begun to have frightened nights and needed to be reassured by the quiet voice. But though the hardness of rationalizing idealism found words, the softness of pity was inarticulate and without visible emotion. Certainly she showed no emotion in those dark weeks just before Sumter fell, when all Old Chester surged with it! She merely suggested to her neighbors (until they stopped speaking to her!) that they should reason together. If anyone consented to do so, she began with the teachings of Jesus—"Christians have never tried Christ's way," she said, calmly; to which people retorted, flippantly or angrily, according to their temperaments; one said, "Good Lord! If the Union is to rely for its safety on the Sermon on the Mount, all I can say is, God help us!" and another quoted:

"John P.

Robinson, he

Says they didn't know everything down in Judee!"

Then she tried Benjamin Franklin's, "There never was a good war, or a bad peace"; and was told that

Ben didn't know what he was talking about! "What this country needs, my dear madam, is a little blood-letting!"

"Whose blood shall be let?" she asked; "that of the handful of men who will make the war, or of the thousands of boys who will fight it?" To this there was only one reply (mentally), "Go to thunder!"

Several times she advanced the premise that constitutionally the South had a right to secede, and its sin of slavery was its own affair. At this point every practical person pointed out that secession *and* slavery would mean interminable border warfare, and turned on his heel! It was the same superhuman idea she had tried to put into Arthur's mind the day he threw her muff into the mud puddle and she dragged him away from Tommy Clark. Now, when she tried to drag Old Chester from what she considered a mud puddle of illogical emotion—tried to drag it along that same dry path of reason, it made Arthur's own protest, which, indeed, is human nature's: "*I want to fight!*" and dug its heels down into primal instincts, and said it *wouldn't* go with her! And it didn't, but it soon, with varying degrees of rudeness, declined the invitation to reason together.

Arthur, pledged to peace and tingling with misery at the separateness it involved, listened to the reasoning, his forehead knotted into a scowl; and he,

too, dug his heels deep into instinct and wouldn't admit that war was wrong. Yet still, in those excited weeks before Sumter fell, every Saturday when he came home from the seminary he heard her unexcited logic. And somehow she drew his denying mind to her own calm certainties. He had to say (as he had said when he acknowledged that if Tommy Clark's thoughts were rude, hitting him wouldn't make the thoughts polite!)—he had to admit that force could not change an Idea; "*but—*" he blustered. And that war was murder, "*but—*" and down went his heels into instinct! And that a fight couldn't show which side was right, only which side was strongest; "*but—*"! And still, in spite of those bracing heels, in spite of all those "*buts,*" he said, at last, hoarsely, "Well, then, if war comes, I can't fight." It was not primarily his religion that made him say that. It was his common sense—a quality not always connected with religion.

Before the call for volunteers came, the boy's mind was in a ferment of pain. Again and again he conquered his conclusion: "I can't fight," and said, "I *will* fight!" It was a see-saw: "I can't—I will!—I won't."

### Chapter Three

IN THE serious alarm of those April days, nobody thought very much of the theories Agnes Kay had instilled into her son, although his apparent lack of belligerency was commented upon once in a while. "Why doesn't he wear petticoats?" said Ellen Clark, with her loud, beautiful laugh; but her question was rather absurd, for she, in voluminous petticoats, was the most belligerent person in town—except Mrs. Buttrick, who talked war from morning until night, and quoted, with simpering apologies for being "just a mite unrefined—but it's *so* patriotic; my Bobby heard it in Philadelphia:

" 'Come, let us chant in perfect tune,  
The South shall be the North's spittoon!' "

If people looked disgusted (some did not) she changed the subject and said that she was horrified at Arthur Kay. "But what can you expect? His mother is a Democrat. And really indecent in her dress—no hoop skirts. And that short hair! Somebody ought to tell her to read her Bible and see what God thinks of long-haired men and short-haired women. But probably she never reads her Bible; you know she's an infidel?—*she sews on Sunday!*"

As for Arthur, in all the patriotism and braggadocio, and terrible and noble anxiety about him, he kept pretty still. If he tried to explain why he thought fighting was wrong, he was answered by roars of laughter. In its lighter moments Old Chester found him amusing, and made jocose references to apron strings, but later it was too angry to laugh at him—it only denounced his mother. Like all the rest of us, Old Chester believed that anyone capable of taking a judicial view of his country was lacking in patriotism. It was then that Lois said, “Arthur! You *know* if the Southern states are so wicked as to secede, it will be glorious to fight for your country!”

To which he replied, with a troubled look: “I’m awfully bothered about it. . . . I don’t see anything ‘wicked’ in seceding—though it’s kind of foolish. And I don’t see anything ‘glorious’ in helping your country to do wrong.” And Lois said to herself, with dismay: “Oh, my! *Is* he afraid?”

His father had no doubt that he was. At their strange, divided dinner table, the Major told the boy not to disgrace his name. This had happened because his wife had said, in her cold way, that there were other methods of freeing the slaves than by war. “Thomas Jefferson’s plan,” she began—But Kay broke in, contemptuously:

“I am not concerned about the slaves. Massachusetts and her lady abolitionists don’t interest me.



I've no desire to die for a nigger. But I'll give my life to preserve the Union!"

"Enforced union is disunion," Agnes Kay said.

"That's so!" said Arthur, boyishly.

At which the Major, striking the table with his fist, cried out, "There are no men on earth who hate war as soldiers do, but if you, a soldier's son, are too white-livered to want war, now, when the Union is at stake, at least oblige me by keeping your mouth shut! I don't want my name disgraced."

His mother said, quickly, "Don't be a coward, Arthur."

George Kay looked up, perplexed. "I thought you were against fighting, too?"

She made no reply; there was not a flicker of amusement in her face at her husband's misunderstanding. But Arthur, laughing in spite of himself, set his father right.

"Mother thinks that fighting is just 'dogs' delight.' So do I. I think going to war is a mighty silly way to spend your time!"

"Perhaps," the Major said, "you think it was a silly way for your great-grandfather to spend his time, in the battle of Lexington?"

"Why, yes, sir," said Arthur (he thought he had no affection for his father, but the desire for his understanding had survived both the lottery and the loft). "Yes, sir! Because, if you come to reason about it——"

George Kay got up, overturning his chair. "Reason be damned!" he said, and banged out of the room. In his library he added to himself: "This is what she's made of him! I could stand it better if he didn't cover things up with his palaver. Why doesn't he *say* he's a coward and be done with it? Everybody knows it."

But in spite of all the excited talk in Old Chester, no one except George Kay really expected war. The habit of peace, perhaps very slightly reinforced by the formula of Christianity (a formula long since discarded by most Christians as impractical), made war unthinkable. The President's call for the militia, three days after the firing on Sumter, had only confirmed the prevailing opinion, that the "erring sisters" would soon come to their senses—although the experience of the Sixth Massachusetts Regiment in Baltimore was a little disturbing. It disturbed George Kay so much that one night, in the tavern, he broke into impassioned loyalty. He was somewhat unsteady on his legs, but his face, solemn and sincere, was very noble.

"For my part," he said, holding up his glass in a shaking hand, "I don't like those self-righteous Massachusetts people, but I swear by the coffins that hold those Massachusetts heroes, by the wives and children who weep for them, by the Stars and Stripes that float over them, that the Union for which they

died shall be the thing for which I live!—or die if need be, as they died.”

The men standing about the barroom agreed, pounding their glasses on the counter and saying: “Hooray!” “Bully for you!” “Yes, siree! We’ll cook South Carolina’s goose!” Yet, in spite of eloquence and whisky, and entirely sincere patriotism, Old Chester really believed things would “quiet down”—because war was, as Dr. Lavendar expressed it, “impossible in these days of a Christian civilization.” Perhaps underneath, Old Chester would have been a little disappointed to have too much Christian civilization. For one thing, it would put a damper on conversation, and everybody wanted to talk!—especially the ladies. They, of course, were more light-heartedly fire eaters than the men. When it comes to War, men have to act, which is not as easy as to talk. In Old Chester—except for a handful of people who could *think*—everybody talked. Everybody had an opinion, either personal or national, which must be expressed!

Bobby Buttrick’s mother said that Bobby was just nach’erly brave. “You ought to hear him sing that spittoon song! So patriotic! If it comes to fighting, I don’t know how I shall be able to keep him at home,” Mrs. Buttrick said, with a proud sigh; “but I simply won’t allow him to go, for, though his whiskers make him look so manly, his stummick is terribly fragile!” William King said that she

could count on him to cure Bobby's fragility, "but," he added, gloomily, "the North—having a strong stomach!—will probably keep on swallowing the South's insults and there will not be any fighting"—which betrayed how he felt about a Christian civilization. His wife, shaking her head solemnly, agreed with him that it wouldn't come to real war; but she would like, she said, to give the President a piece of her mind, and tell him, flatly and frankly, that what South Carolina needed was a good spanking—"Christianity or no Christianity!" said good Episcopalian Martha. Mr. Benjamin Wright said that the North enjoyed being kicked, and Simple Susan (that was what some people, above Mason and Dixon's line, called Lincoln) would no doubt give Jefferson Davis every opportunity to apply his boot to the right spot! He added that the President was an opinionated country lawyer who wasn't willing to take advice from anybody—"even, I fear, from Mrs. King," he said, sardonically; "so nothing will come of all this flurry," which showed how mortifying a Christian civilization might be to a patriot. George Kay did not conceal his hope that patriotism would put Christianity in its place. He said, as he had said before, that soldiers were the men who hated war most, but that now every soldier and every man with a gizzard in him was blue-molding for a fight!

However, tense as those next weeks were, the situ-

ation didn't weigh on Old Chester youth sufficiently to interfere with some mild festivities. It happened that on the third day of May, all the young people being at home because of a school holiday, Lois Clark suggested a picnic. "But I wish we needn't ask Bobby," she said; "he's so fat." Bobby's behavior had lately become very bothering. He was always wanting to hold hands. "Silly!" said sixteen-year-old Lois. She didn't know what it meant, but she didn't like it. "I suppose I'll have to invite him," she said; and Tom said, good-naturedly:

"There's no moral law against being fat. But I almost wish Arthur would have a previous engagement! I can't stand his talk about the rights of those confounded Southern states."

"Then you can stay at home," his sister said, hotly.

"Oh, Arthur's all right," Harry said, soothingly; "except when he talks piousities." But he couldn't resist adding, "Tell him to carry a muff, Lois; it's too cold for his little hands!"

It was a hot morning of high blue skies and little fleecy clouds, and the still hesitating leafage of the woods. All the boys and girls—there must have been forty of them—and Uncle Davy with his fiddle, started off; they were to walk to the Landing, three miles up the river, and there take skiffs over to a great chestnut grove, where the ground was level for dancing.

It was at noon that Old Chester heard the news which meant that dancing was over for our boys.

Dr. Lavendar, when the dispatch came, ate all his fine words about our Christian civilization, climbed into the church tower, and rang the bell. Then, when astonished people came hurrying out-of-doors, saying to one another, "What has happened?" "Where's the fire?" he stood, bareheaded, at the church door, and read the lines of a telegram:

*"The President has called for volunteers."*

There was a moment of stunned astonishment, broken by old Benjamin Wright: "Thank God!"

Then Dr. Lavendar's solemn voice: "My friends, it is sometimes the duty of a man or a nation to choose between righteousness and peace. President Lincoln has chosen righteousness."

There was a murmur of assent, and again silence, for want of words. Then suddenly a breathless voice, "Shall not righteousness and peace kiss each other?" It was Agnes Kay who spoke.

No one listened; at any rate, no one answered, unless it was her husband, who, standing beside Ellen Clark, said, "Righteousness has been tarnation slow in coming. And as for kissing, a man—if he is a man!—will kiss his sword, Mrs. Clark, and leave the Bible to you ladies."

"Oh, not to *me*, please!" Ellen protested, horrified, "I much prefer the sword."

Kay laughed delightedly: "We'll lick the South



out of her boots," he reassured her; "but the President ought to have done this the moment the scoundrels fired on the flag. This is what comes of having a civilian in the White House."

"I'd like to go myself!" Mrs. Clark said.

Mrs. Kay looked at her. "And kill?"

"And save the Union!" Ellen retorted. Then, without waiting for Agnes Kay's calm response, "Better that the Union should perish than be saved by murder," she slipped away, ran up the street and into the rectory stable; the next minute she was leading Dr. Lavendar's horse, Goliath, out of his stall and backing him between the shafts of the shabby buggy. . . . No one thought of her, or noticed her absence, until she and Goliath came down the road, past the church, and Ellen, waving a broken whip to the crowd, called out,

*"My sons are ready."*

People stared at one another—they had forgotten the picnic; but her words slit for an instant the radiant screen of patriotism—that glorious tapestry of platitudes and courage and devotion; of flags and drums and marching feet!—Ellen Clark's words tore that dazzling veil, and showed behind it the real landscape of war; men screaming with foolish hate; dead men, crumpled up and torn to rags on stinking battlefields. Dead boys, even! Perhaps their boys? The boys up in the chestnut grove, now, *dancing!* But it was only an instant's glimpse, and it was as

instantly forgotten. George Kay didn't have even the instant; he flung up his hand and called out. "Wait!" Then ran alongside the buggy, clutched at the dashboard, and was beside Ellen Clark even while she was drawing Goliath up. "My son is ready, too!" he shouted; "and so am I!"

His wife's face went rigid; she made a step forward as if to restrain him, but the buggy had jogged off along the River Road. She sat down on a lichen-blurred slab of granite on four crumbling columns, and ran her finger along the inscription: "Entered into Peace." Suddenly she rose. "I have something to say," she said, in that voice like frightened wings; everyone turned and looked at her. She stood there by the old tomb, in her narrow skirts, the wind blowing her unseemly hair about her ears, her face white with courage. The twisting blue vein in her temple pulsed. "Dr. Lavendar says it is righteous to fight the South. Yet if we lived in South Carolina, wouldn't we think it righteous to fight the North? What is righteousness?"

People looked at one another and raised questioning eyebrows.

"The war against the Seminoles helped the slave owners," she said; "this war will hinder them. Can both wars be righteous? Our war with Mexico was robbery and murder. Was that righteous? We have given the Indians firewater, and taken their lands and slaughtered them, and called it war. Is that

righteous? Thus saith the Lord: '*Thou shalt not kill.*' "

There was a dead silence. Then an irritated murmur. Then old Judge Morrison: "What is that short-haired fool saying now?" After that no one noticed her, except Dr. Lavendar, who said that war was sometimes "an abominable necessity"; then he began a friendly explanation as to the wisdom of supporting the federal government—but she interrupted:

"Was Jesus foolish? He said, 'Put up thy sword!' Is it 'wisdom' to be federalists first and Christians afterward?"

Dr. Lavendar did not press his point, but the Judge retorted, "He also said sell your coat and buy a sword!" and Willy King growled, "When that woman talks peace, she makes me want war!"

His wife, swallowing hard to keep from crying, said, with angry fright (for suppose William should take it into his head to enlist?) that he oughtn't to say things like that! "Married men *can't* go, and certainly professional men who are needed at home have no business to think of such a thing!" said Martha. "Don't be foolish, Willy!"

Of course George Kay did not hear any of this. He was in the buggy with Ellen Clark. "You see," he was saying, "I must speak to Arthur before—anyone else does."

Ellen nodded. "I want to get my boys, now, so

they can start for Mercer to-night. I suppose there is a recruiting office there?"

"They needn't go to Mercer to enlist; we'll get up a company in Old Chester, and muster in all together! It will be hard to hold 'em back for drilling, but I'll put it through. And pay the piper! I'm good for a hundred uniforms, I reckon. Why didn't we get a *horse*? This beast is a snail! South Carolina'll be on her knees before we can get up to the grove!"

The mother whose sons were ready leaned forward, laughing, and making a clucking noise to Goliath.

"Let me take the reins," Kay said. "Mrs. Clark, my boy has been brought up differently from most boys. He's never had a chance. Those True Followers—I understand 'they give their word to Christ' to turn the other cheek also. That's not war, my dear lady, not war! It's—don't think me irreligious; I'm not; I'm a good Episcopalian;—but that sort of talk is—pap! Poetical pap. Well, this fight—there'll be a fight, thank God!—it can't be avoided. It will put Arthur on his feet. . . . G'on, Goliath! And I propose to get up a company, so he can show the stuff that's in him. . . . Confound this horse!"

"My boys will join it. They won't need to be urged."

"My boy won't need to be urged, either. Madam,

I saw that youngster, when he wasn't eight years old, hold my sword as—as a lover might hold his lady's hand! My God! I thought he was going to kiss it! '*Dulce et decorum*'—Yes; he's got my blood in him. . . . I miss my prophecy if all our young men don't get roaring drunk to-night. I hope Arthur will! I'll put the stuff up for him to treat the whole town."

"Oh, they mustn't get—intoxicated!" Ellen protested, shocked and laughing. "I never saw such a slow horse! Do touch him up."

So they went on talking, though probably neither heard the other. When they reached the Landing where, in the morning, the young people had taken their skiffs, there were some frantic moments of waiting for a boatman. Kay leaped out of the buggy and dashed about, hallooing and swearing; Ellen Clark hitched Goliath to a tree and paced up and down; she saw white clouds piling into thunderheads in the west, and said to herself, "There will be a shower, and the girls' dresses will get soaking wet;"—then, with a start, came back from such careless thoughts; girls' dresses? Who will care for things like that, *now!* "They may be wearing black next May," she thought. It seemed as if something struck her over the heart. "*Black?*" . . . Tom? Harry?

Then Kay shouted that he had found a skiff and a man to row them; but when they pushed off, the man, hearing their news, sat open-mouthed and let

the boat drift, until Kay called out to him to get along—get along! Then he dipped his oars in the brown current, muttering, “Just for niggers!”

The Major was voluble with denials: “No! Our government isn’t a lot of Quaker females cackling in chorus about slavery! It merely proposes to preserve the Union. Lincoln had the sense to make that clear in his inaugural. Do you remember, Mrs. Clark? He had ‘no purpose of interfering with the institution of slavery.’ He’s a railsplitter, but he’s no fool.”

Ellen hardly spoke. She was not concerned with causes—the fact of war was enough for her. She certainly was not concerned with the contradiction of her companion’s present enthusiasm, with his fire-eating gallantry in the Seminole War of twenty years before; a little, contemptible war, waged largely in behalf of Southern slaveholders, which sent five hundred runaways back to their owners! She sat with every muscle taut, straining forward with each stroke of the oars; sometimes she bit her red lower lip, sometimes she actually trembled with her efforts to keep from crying out, “Hurry!” But now and then a slow thrill spread between her shoulders: “Oh—not Tom! But I couldn’t lose Harry. Oh—*which?*” Aloud she said, “Hurry—hurry!” And still she thought of wounds—her husband had been killed in the inglorious Mexican War. But—her sons were ready! She didn’t listen to Kay’s inces-



sant talk, his abjurations of South Carolina, and his boasts about his boy; she was seeing wounded men, agonized with thirst on sun-scorched battlefields. "How do you get up a company?" she asked the Major, and while he was telling her she was thinking, with relief, "Oh, *that* will take a long time!" Aloud she said, "It will probably be all over by that time?"

He shook his head. "We have a very timid and obstinate man in the White House, Mrs. Clark; not a soldier. That's the whole trouble. I don't want to call him a coward—that's an ugly word. He's just a civilian—a Simple Susan. A soldier would have acted instanter! We ought to amend the Constitution and say that no man can be President who hasn't been in the Army. This country lawyer dillydallied, and now we're in for it."

"Hurry! Hurry!" she said to the boatman.

A moment later, above the creak of the rowlocks, they heard from upstream the faint strains of Uncle Davy's fiddle—and as they rounded a bend in the river they saw the rowboats pulled up on the shore. Beyond, in the grove, were all Old Chester's boys and girls, dancing.

"My God!" said Kay, huskily, "another tune's been called."

They looked at each other; his jaw set, her eyes were scared. But when the skiff nosed into the sand and the old boatman gave her his hand to come

ashore, she was smiling, her head held high, her cheeks glowing; courage radiated from her, as fragrance from a rose. Kay, stepping as if on parade, fell behind her; he didn't smile, but his flabby face twitched once or twice. They came, under the boughs of the great trees, across the mossy ground and through sheets of young ferns. No one heard them; the laughter, and the fiddle and the loud directing—"Ladies' chain!"—"Salute your partners!"—silenced their approach. For a moment they paused and stood looking at it—dancing Youth! Then something—Ellen Clark never knew what—made her put her hand out to George Kay; there was a silent grip; no words. He nodded; she smiled. Then her voice rang out:

"Young men!"

The dancing feet stopped short; everyone turned, laughing and panting, the girls, in ruffled berthas and floating ribbons, holding out white flounces in the beginning of curtsies; the boys with their arms balancing, their shoulders stiff and swaying. She flung up her hand.

"Boys! It's *war!*"

"The President has called for volunteers," George Kay said.

For a breathless second no one spoke. Then the Clark twins, forgetting their partners, ran forward; Harry put his arm around his mother, and Tom,

laughing, held up his hand like a schoolboy; "Present!" he said.

Instantly all the others—boys and girls—pressed upon the two smiling messengers of woe: had there been more fighting? How were they to get into it? Where do you go to volunteer? It was George Kay who answered. He was the authority; everyone listened respectfully when he spoke, and Uncle Davy, shifting his wad of tobacco from his left cheek to his right, called out: "Speech! Speech!"

Kay, laughing, and pushed by eager young hands up on to a fallen log, said: "Well, I'm not much of a speechmaker! Soldiers use their swords better than their tongues. But we'll get up a company here in Old Chester—all expenses out of my pocket! Will that do for a speech? Perhaps some of you youngsters'll want to join?" he said, jocosely; he had to be jocosely to hide the excited tremor of his chin. Then, suddenly, the tremor and the joking stopped; his face changed, his uplifted hand commanded them:

"Men!"

There was instant silence. "Men of Old Chester! The Union, for which our fathers shed their blood, is menaced. Our mother has been stabbed in the back. How shall we save her? How shall we meet an attempt to assassinate our country? Ah, I need not tell you! Brave men don't need to be told. . . . America has given us freedom, and peace, yes, life

itself! The South shall learn what we will give America: We will give her back our freedom, and take servitude. We will give her back peace, and take strife; we will give her back life, and take death. For I will not deceive you: when we appeal to the God of Battles, death and glory will walk side by side! War is as awful as it is splendid. It means hardship, and sacrifice, and obedience, and danger. It isn't just flags flying and drums beating—my God, no! It is a man's business—a terrible business. Therefore I warn you—even while I ask you: *Who dares come out with me, to die for the Union?*"

There was an instant clamorous "I!" "I!"—"I!" from old Uncle Davy, fiddling himself, at seventy-three, into his grave; "I!" from almost blind Albert Hough; from poor Sam Dane, who had a paralyzed foot. The Clarks roared "I!"

"I!" from everybody except the girls—and Arthur Kay. . . . Even Bobby Buttrick, his very whiskers pale, thundered "*I*"—but he added to Lois, "Oh, my! I'm sick to my stummick."

Mrs. Clark put her hands on her boys' shoulders. "I give you," she said, in a low voice, "to your country."

Even while he was speaking, George Kay's eyes had been seeking his son. This was the great moment; the moment when Arthur would "show the stuff that was in him"! When he stepped down

from his crumbling rostrum, he went around behind the surging, glowing crowd, and found the boy on the outskirts; he struck him on the arm. "Well?" he said.

Arthur's handsome face—hilarious ten minutes before, and ruddy with dancing—was white. "I think," he said—his effort not to offend was obvious—"I think, sir, that the South has a right to go, if it wants to."

"Do you set yourself up, sir, to say that secession is right, when the United States Government says it is wrong?" Major Kay said, sternly.

"Well," said the boy, "I have to say what I think." He was trying to speak lightly, but suddenly, as if he couldn't help himself, his voice tightened into imploring reality; "Father! don't you see? A Christian can't fight! And, anyhow, fighting won't change South Carolina's *mind*—"

"A horsewhip will change a fool's mind," his father said, furiously. "You are a coward!" Then under his breath, "Hold your tongue." At least people should not hear this shameful talk.

But Arthur, just as furiously, cried out, "All right, then—I am a coward! For *I won't fight*."

Everyone heard him. There was a gasp of silence. Then Uncle Davy, looking at poor George Kay, shifted his wad of tobacco from his right cheek to his left cheek, and said, softly, "Jumping Jehoshaphat!"

They went down to the boats in a hurrying group, crowding and jostling one another in the unity of a herd of sheep, running to the slaughter.

### WAR!

Why is the word so sweet and so compelling? Why does age, without pausing for the explanatory and commanding voice of reason, thrill when it is spoken, and youth so eagerly rush to the arms of death? Not a boy among the Old Chester youngsters really knew what it was all about. For that matter, not all the grown people understood. Yet, old and young, they were panting to lift to their lips the cup of war brimmed with the bright wine of hell. They were all eager to drink that demoralizing toast—"My country!—*right or wrong.*" All eager for the desolating glory of war.

Of course Arthur, walking by himself, was not saying anything like this. He was too young to analyze the emotion that flowed around him in almost palpable waves; but he saw people's faces: Mrs. Clark's gay, good-natured face—now white and solemn; his father's bloated face—exalted, sharpened into power; the faces of the boys, always so careless in selfish happiness—stern with suddenly acquired purpose; the faces of the girls, that used to be just pretty and challenging—marvels, now, of devotion. Amazing devotion to—to what? They could not possibly have told him! He saw all these transformed, ennobled faces, and his own face



felt stiff. "But," he thought, bewildered, "how do they know whether South Carolina is right or wrong?"

He heard behind him his father's voice: "It's lucky war has its unpleasant side or we'd love it so much we'd never stop fighting!" And one of the twins called back, "When we whip the South, sir, let's go over and lambast England!" "We'll wallop the world!" another youngster announced. All in a moment, the dragons' teeth, the entirely ridiculous animosities of war, had sprung up. . . . Arthur wanted to hate, too; he wanted to feel as the others felt. *And he couldn't.* His lip was almost trembling with this flooding misery of being "different," when he felt Lois' hand on his arm. She had fallen behind the others to walk close to him; it was so like Lois to offer her comforting presence, and not wait for him to seek it!

"You'll join the company, won't you?" she said, in a whisper.

He shook his head; he couldn't trust himself to speak.

"But they'll think—you're afraid! Oh, why did you say you were afraid!" Her voice was horrified.

"Because I am," he managed to say, huskily; "I'm 'afraid' to kill people. Don't you see?" he implored her.

"Of course!" she said. But she didn't see, in the least. All she saw was that he was suffering, be-

cause, she thought, *he was scared!* Of course she knew he wasn't brave—like the twins; she had always known that. But his admission of it shocked her, as the uncovering of a bodily defect would have shocked her. Then because, though her mind was slow, her heart had wings, her tenderness sprang to his spiritual relief, just as her hand would have hurried to relieve his body. ("He can't help it," she told herself.) "Arthur! I don't believe you'd get shot!"—which was so ridiculous that, in spite of his smothered agitation, he laughed. She would have gone on trying, pitifully, to encourage him, but the rest of the party had reached the boats and were calling and beckoning.

Later, Arthur, rowing some girls back to the Landing, listened in silence to their excited chattering of bravery and glory, and wicked Democrats who had encouraged the South, and Lincoln's delay in smashing the rebellion, and quoting their elders: "He ought to have taken off those black kid gloves he wore to the opera, and signed a 'proclamation'—" He knew that it was all intended to make him uncomfortable. And it did—though he assured himself that it didn't—"not in the least!" At the Landing, thankful to escape from them, he was relegated to the buggy and Goliath, and—to his rage—Bobby Buttrick! Mrs. Clark, with splendid, rallying laughter, and the Major, nonchalant and swaggering, and Uncle Davy, bewildered and a little fright-

ened—all wanted to walk with the young people, though there was an increasing grumble of thunder in the darkening west. But Bobby had said he must go in the buggy, on account of his throat.

"This damned damp will give me an awful cold," Bobby said. He was truly worried about the rain, but he added to Arthur, as Goliath jogged off, that 'course everybody in South Carolina ought to be hung! "But you're right, old man, it's no good going to war about it. Let 'em rip! I don't believe in war. I think it's wicked. Anyway, it's tarnation silly to make a target of yourself for a lot of traitors to shoot at! *I won't do it,*" said Bobby. He was shaking with fright.

To be agreed with by Bobby was a last straw to Arthur. He had never hated Mrs. Buttrick's darling so acutely as he did during those three miles when, in Dr. Lavendar's buggy, safely protected from the approaching downpour, he had to listen to poor Bobby's talk about his "stummick," and see him touching his yellow whiskers with trembling fingers. "Yes," Arthur thought (he never spoke from the time they started until they reached Old Chester)—"yes, Fatty and I are the prize cowards of this town." The rain fell in sudden sheets; Bobby worried audibly about his throat, and Arthur, gnashing his teeth, wished he could kill him! Most of all, he wished his father could understand. "I don't care a hoot about other people!" He thought

of his father, standing there, his face white and twitching, saying those glowing words. . . .  
“ ’Course, he’s wrong,” Arthur said to himself; “but I don’t care, he’s bully!” By the time they reached town he was choking with misery.

He dropped Bobby at his own door (where Mrs. Buttrick was waiting in weeping alarm), put up the horse in the rectory stable, hurried home and upstairs to his mother’s room; then to the loft. Not finding her in either place, he reflected; heard a crack of thunder, and ran down to the cellar. She was there, sitting on an upturned keg, in a dark corner, poor frightened Rover crouching against her. She stopped stroking the shivering, wheezing old dog, and looking up at her son, said just four words:

“Are you a coward?” Her anxiety was anguish.

“I guess I am,” he said, dryly; “I’d like to sneak into a mousehole! But I won’t fight, if that’s what you mean.”

She put her cheek down on Rover’s head; when she looked up he caught his breath—her face was convulsed with tears! He had never in his life seen his mother weep. “I beg your pardon, Arthur,” she said.

“I think,” he said, abruptly, “Father is just splendid!” What made him say it? He could see her recoil at his unreason; but he didn’t care. His own eyes were angry with tears.

She was silent. To the passionate maternity of her intellect—which is so different from the maternal passion—his irrationality was a blow that made her very mind wince. And it frightened her, too; would he be swept into the madness? He made no attempt to reassure her. He only said, shortly, "I'll stay with Rover."

She said she would be glad if he would. "I'm afraid Mary is going to be fussy. I had to—to hold her hands for a while." She flinched at the memory of those big hands trying to stroke her hair.

He took her place beside Rover, who whimpered and put his nose on his master's knee. But Arthur didn't notice him. He had forgotten Rover. He was thinking of Old Chester. . . . It had probably begun to talk about him already. The old ladies were murmuring, "How shocking!" The old gentlemen were snorting, "Squirt!" He knew how the younger men would dispose of him: "Kick him out of town!" The fellows of his own age would snicker and ask, "What can you expect from Sissy?" The girls would look at one another and say: "Did you *ever*? He's afraid!" All but Lois. Lois wouldn't say that. *Lois* knew. But his father. . . . His desire for his father's approval—his father, of whom he so entirely disapproved, who was so absolutely wrong about pretty much everything, but who was "splendid"—was an actual ache. And his father had called him a coward! . . . The thunder

roared and crashed; Rover quivered from head to foot. Arthur swore softly at him, then patted him. But he could not pay attention to Rover; he was intent upon destroying his own principles. He was aided by every instinct of his young body, and by the vision of his father standing, white-faced, under the trees, saying those foolish, thrilling words! They were only words—as brittle as glass, yet so glorious that they made his mother’s iron “reasoning” look mean and dingy. The boy, catching at the shining words, told himself that there *are* times when war is right, because it is necessary. He thought, triumphantly, of exceptions to that rule (which has never been tried in human affairs), “*Love your enemies.*” “Suppose we hadn’t fought in the Revolutionary War; now, we’d have been just an English province. No; these are not New Testament days. A man has to fight for his country!” Then he repeated, with a thrill, some of the glib sanctities of patriotism, the cheap braggings as to America’s greatness, which had been flying about Old Chester for the last few months. The nobler humilities and shames of the true lover of his country would not, at this moment, have encouraged Arthur’s ardor; nor did his reason remind him that in that despised thing, an “English province,” there would have been no slavery, so the present cause of secession would not have existed. As for the teachings of Christ, why, “you can’t take them literally—except for individuals!” In his re-



lief he sprang to his feet; he would go and tell his father he would enlist. But the next minute his mind jerked him back to the aridities of reason: if individuals acted on Christ's teachings, then nations, which are made up of individuals, wouldn't be enemies, and governments—"a lot of old men too doddering to fight, themselves"—couldn't make wars. The deduction seemed inescapable; when he recoiled from it, he was driven back by the common-sense of the three ruthless words, Love your enemies.

But at that moment Arthur had no love for anybody! "I want to fight, and I will!" he said: "Rover, if you don't keep quiet—" Rover lapped his cheek. Arthur pulled his silky ear and mumbled, "Good old coward!" It was all very young, this misery—but it was very real.

While he was sitting there, his father, out in the falling rain on the front steps of the tavern, was announcing to his fellow townsmen his purpose of recruiting, drilling, and outfitting at his own expense, as large a company as Old Chester could muster. "There ought to be a hundred, anyway," he said; "when we get into shape, we will offer ourselves to our country." He spoke heavily; the passion of that moment up in the grove had flattened out. He was tired, and wanted a drink. The group in the rain broke into cheers. Kay, listening, thought of his son—a coward! "How can I ask other men's sons

to volunteer?" Even while they were cheering, he turned on his heel and went into the tavern.

Every household in Old Chester that night was stirred with admiration for him; yet there was one person whose thoughts ran to the father, rather than to the patriot. The father—who had heard his only son announce that he was "afraid!" Mrs. Clark, in her comfortable, shabby parlor, with her sons who were scenting the battle from afar off, swallowing the ground with fierceness and rage, and knowing no more what it was all about than Job's war horse!—Ellen Clark thought of George Kay's anguish of mortification. . . . The twins talked every minute: Glorification of the North! Abuse of the South—especially of South Carolina! In their hot young minds, South Carolina had changed overnight from a state where some much-loved cousins, the Ralph Clarks, lived, to a place inhabited by traitors. "Judases!" Harry said.

"To keep from forgetting the scoundrels," Tom announced, "I'll say, 'To hell with South Carolina!' every time I brush my teeth."

"I will say it every time I light a cigar," Harry promised.

Their mother, pretending to be shocked, said: "Boys! Boys! Don't forget dear Cousin Ralph; you mustn't say 'to hell' with him."

"If he won't fight for the Union, he's no cousin of mine!" Tom said.

But Lois pounced upon him. "Cousin Ralph may say you're no cousin of his if you won't fight for South Carolina. I guess God likes South Carolina as much as He likes Pennsylvania!" "Goose!" said Harry. And their mother said, "Don't squabble, children;" then added without any apparent connection, "I'm sorry for Major Kay."

"Why?" Harry said. "He's going to get up the company. He's happy!"

"He won't have Arthur in his company; that's why I am sorry for him."

"Arthur's always been cowardly," Harry said.

"It isn't being a coward, to say that the South has a right to secede!" Lois said, quickly.

"Oh, he's merely disloyal?" Tom mocked.

"He's not! But he—he doesn't like fighting."

"No," Harry agreed, significantly, "he doesn't. Bobby says he'd shake hands with any damned Southerner that pointed a gun at him."

"I *hate* Bobby Buttrick!" Lois flung back; "and his horrid, vulgar song! And Jesus said, 'Love your enemies.'"

"Oh," said Tom, frowning, "let's drop Jesus—"

"*Tom!*" his mother protested.

"Well, you've got to drop war *or* Jesus," Tom said, with rather surprising acuteness—for a Clark. "And I'm for war!"

Even his martial mother didn't quite like that; "War is too awful to be spoken of in that way, Tom.

Your dear father—" she said, and sighed. Then reminded Lois, "Christ's words about loving your enemies are figurative, honey."

Nobody in that simple group retorted, "Which of Christ's words are figurative, and which are not?" Only Arthur, sitting in the cellar with Rover, or his mother, whose enemy, a-hungred, had been fed—would have said a thing like that.

"Sissy is too ladylike for good honest bloodshed," Tom said, "I always thought he knocked Bobby's tooth out by accident."

Lois burst into furious tears. "It wasn't accident—he did it on purpose, because Bobby was bothering me. You can't understand Arthur! Some people are born with a horror of fighting."

"They are born with a desire to keep a whole skin."

"What about your dear beloved Bobby?"

"He isn't my dear beloved, and he's an awful muff; but he doesn't set himself up and say he's right and everybody else on earth is wrong—like Arthur."

"Bobby is white-livered," Tom declared; "but he has the decency to be ashamed of it. He tries to pull the wool over our eyes by talking about his 'stummick.' That's why I can stand him better than I can Arthur."

Lois stamped with anger. "You boys are—beasts!"

"Lois!—don't be unladylike," said her mother.

But Harry put his arm around her with teasing tenderness. "He *is* nice about tatting and canary birds—" She flung his arm from her shoulder, but he put it back again. "Lois, hold on! I think he really *was* born that way. Don't you remember, he always carried his mother's muff to school? There's something wrong with a man who'll wear a lady's togs. And when the fellows hit him, he hadn't the gizzard to hit back."

"Lois," Tom broke in, "if Arthur doesn't fight for his country in our company, you'll have to drop him—for a coward!"

"I'll never drop him," Lois said. "If he is afraid, why, then he can't help it. Anyway, he thinks it's wrong to fight. He says people ought to reason—not kill one another. Oh, I won't *let* you say those things about Arthur! He's my friend!" Her wild defense was as sweet as it was indiscriminating. She suffered because they called him a coward! She wanted him—oh, dreadfully she wanted him—to be brave, like the twins; but her heart—the same little heart that so long ago had ached for baby crocodiles—was all a tremor of pity and fierce tenderness; her brothers' contempt hurt her like a blow on her own breast. "Arthur can't help being a—a . . . not liking war," she said, "and I just about hate you boys!" She whirled out of the room. A minute later they heard her bedroom door slam.

Tom whistled, but Harry looked anxious. "Mother, is she gone on him?"

"Of course not! She's just a child. But I'm sorry for his father. Think how I would feel if my boys wouldn't fight!" she said. The twins guffawed at the idea—but a thrill crept between Ellen Clark's shoulders and down her back, and she saw terrible gaping faces; heard a lamentable voice wailing—wailing. Would it be Tom's voice? Or Harry's?

In many houses in Old Chester that night there was this talk of war and soldiering and patriotism. . . . In Kay's house there was silence. The Major, in his little room behind his library, was lying cross-wise on his bed, one boot off, one on, snoring drunk. Arthur, in his room, was walking about, his hands clenched, his eyes hot with unshed tears.

Mrs. Kay, up in the loft, was kneeling by her iron cot outside Mary's door; there was a candle on the table, but its light, falling on the pages of her Bible and glimmering on the great chimney-stacks, was swallowed up in the dusk of the rafters. She was praying, her face buried in her hands. "Lighten his darkness," she prayed. She did not say whose darkness.



## *Chapter Four*

IT WAS during that summer that the two children—they were only children, Lois not seventeen and Arthur just eighteen—knew that they were in love with each other. It was Old Chester which opened their eyes to the fact, because Old Chester's displeasure made Arthur turn to Lois for understanding, and made Lois turn to Arthur with protection. When that happened, of course they knew. . . .

Old Chester did not conceal its disapproval of Arthur; he refused to enter his father's company! He gave all sorts of excuses for what was inexcusable! He talked a lot of hifalutin stuff about states' rights, and murder, and fighting only proving might—not right.

"Blatherskite!" said Old Chester; "his mother puts all that twaddle into his head!" "Yes, it's her doing," some one said; "I hate a sentimentalist!" Curiously enough, it was old red-peppery Benjamin Wright who mumbled back: "That's how they felt in Jerusalem some nineteen hundred years ago." Even Dr. Lavendar cautioned Mrs. Kay, good naturedly: "Don't let Arthur forget that conceit is

the devil's horse, and reformers generally ride it when they are in a hurry."

Martha King said it was disgusting to see a boy so anxious to save his skin. "Of course," Mrs. King said, "*married* men oughtn't to enlist, much as they might like to" (William winked at Dr. Lavendar). "And it would be really wrong for a person like a doctor," poor Martha insisted, trembling (for William had broken to her his intention of doing his part); "it would be wicked for a doctor, needed in his community, to go! But there's something wrong if a young man who has no family or professional responsibilities, holds back!"

"It's Mrs. Kay's influence," Mrs. Buttrick said. "Now me, I've brought up my boy, ever since he was in baby clothes, to be just nach'erly patriotic. You ought to hear him sing, 'Come, let us chant.' He is wild to volunteer, but I just say I won't allow it. He's so frail."

Fathers of less fragile sons, said that Arthur was a self-opinionated jackass. "Why doesn't he tell the truth and say he's *afraid*?" they said.

And always the mothers cried out, "He did say so—that day in the grove!"

"Well, that's at the bottom of all his talk of war being 'wicked,' " said Old Chester; "it's bad enough to be a coward, but he needn't lie, too."

It was at this point that Dr. Lavendar made a very irritating remark; he said that if a man really

and truly believed that black was white, you might advise him to see an oculist, but you mustn't call him a liar.

"Fortunately," said Old Chester, "his father doesn't have to wear spectacles! But he must be mortified to death."

He was. But he didn't tell Arthur so. He said to himself that he was done with Arthur; he wouldn't even lie about him any more and say he had a gizzard in him. "He hasn't—and everybody knows it!" He only saw his son on Saturdays and Sundays when the boy came home from the seminary; then they met three times a day at that abundant, scanty table of theirs. Once, at dinner, Mrs. Kay—her short hair graying now and tucked behind her ears, her face lined and tired—asked Arthur a question about the seminary; when he answered, adding, unfortunately, that it was easy now for Professor Hall, because less than half of the senior class was left, his father looked up:

"Of course the *men* have gone," he said; "and I reckon an infant class is easier."

Arthur blanched, but he was dumb.

As for the Major, he felt a little sick; "*My son!*" he said to himself; "and here am I urging other men's sons to fight!" . . . His disgust was almost physical pain. "A coward!" he thought, as all Old Chester was thinking—and saying, too; except Lois, who was away most of the summer, mak-

ing visits and who, mortified and pitiful, would have died rather than say it! And Dr. Lavendar, who didn't *quite* think it, but believed that being skinned alive was a good preventive of cowardice; and the True Followers, who took his faithfulness to his pledge for granted; and his mother, who prayed that he might have courage to be a "coward." But everybody else either despised the boy or hated him; especially those fathers and mothers who saw their own boys setting out upon that "path of glory which leads. . . ."

By the time Bull Run had shocked the North into realization of what war meant, Arthur had learned something that youth has no right to know, namely, the cat-cruelty of human nature. Just at first, experiencing this cruelty, he could not believe his own eyes and ears; there must be a mistake! People simply didn't understand; it was only necessary to explain. So he explained: "You see, war is foolish, because—" Nobody listened. Then, passionately: "It's wicked, because—" And they turned away with what restraint they could. "If it wasn't for his father," Bobby Buttrick said, "this town would tar and feather him!"

Fatty had forgotten that terrified moment in the buggy when he had agreed with Arthur that war was wicked. He was now very bitter because he wasn't well enough to volunteer; he said that his mother said she might have to take him to Phila-

delphia to see a doctor. "Ma says Dr. King doesn't know how to treat a really serious case of dyspepsia," said Bobby. And certainly William's ignorance was such that the only advice he gave the patient was, "Don't eat so much." "And he had the face," Mrs. Buttrick said, angrily, "to charge for it in his bill!"

Yet Old Chester, though it saw through Bobby's "stummick" and knew that there was no backbone behind it, did not hate him as it hated Arthur; it said, chuckling, that Bobby, for all his lovely whiskers, was barking through the fence. But his effort to disguise his fear by lying about it was, in its way, a tribute to other people's courage. Bobby was not criticizing his betters by talking about right and wrong. "Sissy thinks he knows what is right, better than his betters!" said Old Chester.

But in those first weeks nothing much was said about Arthur and his mother, and their theories. People had more serious things to think of than two eccentric, not to say disloyal, persons, who set up their own Ebenezers at this moment of national alarm. So Agnes Kay and her son were merely ignored—except by little boys, running rosy-faced to school, who at sight of them put their thumbs to their noses and sang, shrilly,

"Democrats  
Eat rats!"

and by some of the girls, who sent Arthur white feathers by mail. But most people just passed the "traitors" on the street, carefully not seeing them. Later no annoyance was too small, or too mean, to be visited upon them; the butcher sold Mrs. Kay tainted meat; some one left a moth-eaten wig at her door, with an anonymous letter telling her to consult the eleventh chapter of First Corinthians, and see what St. Paul thought of women who cut their hair. Later, actual injury was inflicted; a chicken coop was burned, and up in the woods the cabin Arthur had built for his traps was chopped to pieces. A peculiarly cruel thing was done when some one put a ladder up against the ell on a dark night, and smashed the barred windows in Mary's room, letting the broken glass fall about the fat, screaming creature's head.

While these malignant things were happening, and angry contempt was growing in Arthur's soul, and his mother was laconically reminding him that other people's opinions were of no importance, George Kay's name was spoken with affection and admiration. No one remembered anything shady in his past, or noticed anything weak in his present. As for his money, what difference did it make where it came from? He was using it for his country! "Beau Kay's Company" became the pride of Old Chester; and of course the inevitable happened; the Major, lifted into the respect of his community,



began to deserve it! War became his religion. He even ceased to laugh at Massachusetts "lady abolitionists" or the Quaker women who had, as he said once, "cackled in chorus" against slavery; they had, in their foolish way, put a match to the powder magazine—and for that he was grateful. He worked from morning until night. His drinking diminished to a point far below what was called moderate in those days. His flabby face grew lean, and the lines of his jaw and forehead showed unexpected nobility and strength. His black eyes were clear and stern. He became a martinet, drilling his soldier boys to private moralities and decorums, as well as military maneuvers. Every Sunday Old Chester's hundred youngsters, preceded by their captain, marched up the aisle and sat, their arms folded, under Dr. Lavendar, never daring to look this way or that, or yawn, or scuffle, or do any of the things they had done all their lives.

It was said that Kay noticed any nose that was not pointed toward Dr. Lavendar—and pulled it, after service! One Sunday he put Harry Clark in an improvised guardhouse (the basement of the church), because, the Major said, he had "referred to our Commander-in-chief as 'Simple Susan.'" (Kay's admiration for Lincoln, now, was passionate.) After church, when the boys marched down the aisle and out on to the green, to be surrounded by admiring girls and proud, misty-eyed mothers

and fathers who wished they were boys themselves—Beau Kay's eye was still upon them, to be sure that there was no relaxing from soldierly rigidity. "No slobbering!" was his phrase.

The Buttrick mother and son were not in these little worshiping groups; she had bought a lucky number in Kay's lottery, and had been able to carry Bobby off to Philadelphia to see, she said, "a real doctor." Nor were George Kay's wife and son there. They were sitting in the bare chapel of the True Followers, listening to the mystical old man in the pulpit preaching ineffable impossibilities:

*"Though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh; the weapons of our warfare are not carnal."*

Arthur, listening, and thinking of his strange unkind world, which apparently knew nothing of those weapons, not of the flesh, which are "mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds," wrapped himself in silence. It was easy to do this because, as soon as the seminary closed, he got some clerical work in Watson Brothers' Sugar Warehouse in Mercer. He took the place of a clerk who had volunteered. "In business," Arthur thought, sardonically, "cowards are quite useful. And how rich I'll get on five dollars a week!" This last, because people were talking about his contemptible eagerness to make money. "But he has always run after ten cents," Old Chester said; "think of the socks!"

So, running after five dollars, Arthur day after day sat at a desk in a little glassed-in pen among hogs-heads of sugar and molasses, and added up columns of figures. When he was at home, which was only for an occasional Sunday, he generally hid himself in the loft, where he would be sure not to see his father; then, too, from the loft window, he could look down into the Clark garden, and wonder when Lois would get home. Sometimes he spent the day in the woods, rebuilding his cabin. He had visions of living in it, all by himself, just to escape from Old Chester's contempt. He did spend a night there once in a while; a night of looking at the stars, and watching the lights down the valley go out, one by one, and seeing, by and by, the rim of the world tilting black against the dawn. A night of wondering why people wouldn't listen to his reasons for not joining his father's company. Such nights hardened his mind and chilled his heart. That trust in human-kind survived in him at all was because of his one certainty: *Lois understood*.

His mother did too, of course; but that didn't help him very much. She was even more of an out-cast than he was himself. Indeed, once or twice her understanding meant so little to him that he felt something like irritation at her, because she had led him into this solitude of reason! Of course this was not often—only in frantic moments when his longing to be in "Kay's Company" was like hunger.

Then, one day, he was ashamed of his irritation. . . . He had come up to the loft to speak to his mother, but she was in Mary's room, so he sat down on the old cowhide trunk to wait for her; and while he waited he thought, as he had been thinking every day, almost every hour, during these last weeks, of Old Chester's belief that he was *afraid*! It had become an obsession. Even when he was at work there was always a wordless ache in his mind, which he tried to dull by saying, "Well, I don't care a copper what they believe!" As he sat there—a big, handsome fellow, his chin on his clenched fist—he noticed that Mary's door was ajar, and, idly glancing into the room, he saw his mother on her knees before the fat, drowsing woman—washing her feet. Oh, so gently the delicate worn hands held a big foot, so gently the sponge touched it, so softly the towel dried it. . . .

He went stealthily out of the loft, down to his own room. His throat ached with tenderness for her. It was then that he knew the reality of her religion; he knew what it meant to be a True Follower. He saw, made flesh before him, the divine foolishness of Jesus: love your enemy. The boy did not say this, of course; he only said: "I will never fight. No; not if it kills me not to."

It did just about kill him! For a day or two, thinking of the washing of the feet, he was profoundly ashamed that he had been irritated at his

mother. But such high moments of humility go, as well as come; and very soon he was again resenting with anguished arrogance, the isolation of being misunderstood.

But all the time he never doubted Lois' understanding—except once when, up in the loft, brooding over some of Old Chester's especially poisonous pin pricks, he had an instant of distrusting even her. . . . "Maybe *she* thinks I'm afraid, too?" He was sitting by the open window trying to read, but really watching a blue bottlefly, caught between the two rickety sashes and droning up and down a bubbly pane of glass. Suddenly he heard, far down the street, the strains of the band.

A minute later, through the Clark pear trees, he saw the marching ripple of the stars and stripes. "Kay's Company" was maneuvering. He hid his face in his hands. When he looked up—there was Lois, in her garden! "Oh—she's come home!" he thought, and jumped to his feet in the impulse to rush down and speak to her—then checked himself. Would she speak to him? But Lois had caught sight of him.

"Arthur!" she called up.

He waved his hand, but his face was rigid. She, waving back, called again; "I'm coming in!"

He yelled some eager extravagance, and dashed down the three flights of stairs to meet her at the front door.

"I haven't seen you for ages," Lois said. "I suppose you are such a business man that you didn't even know I was away from home? Were you reading?"—he had taken her up to the loft, explaining that his mother was out and he had to sit there. "Oh yes, I know I'm a nuisance, interrupting you!" she said. She was like a sunbeam penetrating the dusky stillness of the garret; she wore a chintz dress, little pink and blue palm leaves, all flounced to her waist, and her hair, catching the light from the window, made an aureole about her young face. Then she looked into his face. "Oh, you are perfectly wretched!" she said, dismayed.

"Well," he admitted, "you see, nobody understands."

"*I* do," she said. She caught his hand (it was trembling) and held it against her young breast; the feeling of the starched chintz, and the warm softness below it, thrilled the boy so that he almost gasped. She felt no thrill; she was still entirely a child; she felt nothing but the impulse to take care of him. For a minute she stroked that big, sensitive, freckled hand, and held it under her soft chin, then put it against the wild rose of her cheek, and brooded over it as if it were a suffering thing. (Oh, if she could only make him brave—brave enough to volunteer!) She forgot her shamed distress that he was "not like the twins". Pity—the rare and



heavenly pity of a child—filled the cup of her heart. "Don't mind what they think," she entreated; "Arthur—*Don't* mind!"

"They think I lie, because I say I believe war is wrong, instead of saying I'm afraid."

"It isn't lying not to say that!" she defended him. "You don't have to tell everybody what you think."

"Well, I don't care what they say. I don't care *that!* And I'll never fight."

She said, hesitatingly, "Don't you think, maybe, sometime—?"

"Never! Lois, when I see how—well, sort of queer, sort of brutish and foolish, even the thought of fighting makes people, why, I am *afraid*. Because I know I could be that way, too, if I—got going! And it frightens me," he said earnestly. "But anyway I won't fight. No matter what people say! I've taken the pledge to Peace." His voice was suddenly violent.

"I understand," she said, soothingly; "I understand *entirely*."

"Well, then, if you do, everybody else can go to the devil! But I was awfully afraid you despised me, like all the rest of 'em."

"You might give me credit for some sense!" she said.

"Oh, Lois," he said, "I do know you have sense! Since you've been away, I've said to myself—I don't

know how many times—that *you* understood. And I'll never again insult you by explaining things to you. Why, Lois, you are—you are—" He wanted to tell her she was an angel, but when you've known a girl all your life, and told her she was the stupidest person on earth about arithmetic, you can't tell her, suddenly, that she is an angel. Instead, he said he guessed that she and Rover (of course he forgot his mother) were the only people in Old Chester who had any sense. And then he said it was awfully hot. And both their young hearts pounded like mad!

"I must go," she said breathlessly; "Emma is out this afternoon, and I'm getting supper—" She flew downstairs, Arthur behind her, his eyes still dazzled by her glinting hair, and with a queer feeling in his arms—as if they wanted to catch hold of her.

Yet when he went back to the loft, he didn't tell himself he loved her. The idea never occurred to him. He just looked at his hand—the hand she had pressed into the warm hollow of her throat! No; he didn't know it was love. He only knew that that weight, which ever since the day of the picnic had been grinding him down into the misery of mental solitariness, and making him hate everybody—had lifted as that sunny figure stood in the darkness and told him she understood! He was no longer deso-

late, and the misunderstanding of the entire world was unimportant.

It was then that he lifted her upon a pedestal. It is the high adventure of love to take this risk of placing the beloved beyond reality. Arthur, putting Lois upon the altar of his dreams, could not see her realities. Her lack of reason was not visible to him, nor could he discern that her tenderness was rooted in pity. She wasn't any more the little quick-hearted Lois of his childhood, who couldn't say her multiplication table, and always took the initiative in demonstrative affection. Up there on her pedestal she was all wisdom and understanding: *she knew that he was not a coward!* Also, suddenly, for he had never thought of Lois in this way, he dowered her with heavenly purity. This thought of purity, in an eighteen-year-old boy's clean mind, is the homage of his own exultant and terrifying self-knowledge. . . . He worshiped . . . but he only said, "*She knows*, and I don't care a hoot about Old Chester!"

He did not see her again for weeks. He went back to Mercer on Monday, and before his return the next Saturday she had gone away again for another month of visiting. But he thought of her constantly, and always with the certainty that "Lois would stick up for him"—though everybody else despised him! Yet his consciousness of being de-

spised made him shy; and when he once tried to write to her it was the usual curt and clumsy letter of a boy who couldn't think of anything to say—except that he had “hooked some pears out of her garden”.

## Chapter Five

SO IT was that all that summer, while George Kay—now so rigid in his bearing, so immaculate in his dress, so entirely sober and so passionately loyal to the President—licked the sons of other men into shape to meet death, his own son worked, without risk of death, in Watson Brothers' warehouse where the unceasing screech of the block and tackle outside his window, the trundle of drays on the cobblestones of the levee, the shunting of freight cars and whistling of locomotives in the train yards, made any moment of silence a loud interruption in his unhappy thought. . . . People wondered afterward whether the Major, as September approached, did not plan to have his little company mustered in on a certain date, *on purpose*? "Just to put Arthur through a course of sprouts!" At any rate, the day of the week and the hour of the day when he marched his gallant youngsters off, was the day and hour when his son left Old Chester on the morning stage to return to the safety of the molasses warehouse. The Major had sprung marching orders upon his little company on Saturday, and in the exalted flurry of the next forty-eight hours nobody thought how the occasion would affect Arthur Kay—

"skulking home for Sunday," as some one expressed it. But his pallor, when he heard what was going to happen, betrayed his misery. He looked almost sick; indeed, at the supper table Saturday night, his mother asked him if he had a headache.

His father gave him a swift look. "It will be a dose," he was thinking; "just to look at the boys from the stage window will be a dose. It will be sulphur and molasses—and senna! But it may cure him." And he mixed the curative experience in fierce proportions. "I'm sorry for Willy King," he said, amiably; "you know he's withdrawn his application to the Medical Department?"

Mrs. Kay said she had heard so.

"People will think he's been henpecked into staying at home;—certainly that wife of his would like to keep him done up in cotton batting. But I know better. He's doing the hardest thing a brave man can do—keeping out of a fight!" Arthur looked up eagerly. "Yes," the Major said, with ominous gentleness, "Dr. King is staying at home to look after old women who eat too much, and old men who—ah—drink too much, and to help a few babies into the world, because he's the only doctor between here and Mercer. Facing cannon is nothing to that! Yet there will be people who will think he's one of those pious milksops, under a woman's influence, who want to be safe. And make money."



His tone was suddenly scathing. No one answered him, but Arthur's face grew rigid.

"We march Monday morning when the stage starts," Major Kay rambled on; "two or three old people want to ride along a mile or two, and look at their boys. Bursting with pride, they are! And I reckon the girls will walk part way with us; some of 'em have sweethearts in the ranks. No Old Chester girl would have a sweetheart out of the ranks! Well, I'm glad to get started. I don't know how much longer I could have held those young cusses of mine back. By God, I believe, if I hadn't grabbed his shirt tail, Tommy Clark would have deserted and run to Washington, to get into action a little sooner! I said, 'If you do, sir, it won't be the rebels who'll shoot you. I'll do it myself—or your mother will.' That Clark woman is a mother of men,—and mighty good-looking, too!"

Silence. Mrs. Kay ate her bread and butter; her husband scraped up browned crumbs from under his partridge. Arthur pushed back his chair. "Please excuse me," he said. The Major, elated by his success in tormenting him, said to himself, "*That* got under the fifth rib!"

It got so far under that Arthur, as he left the room, looked as if he was really bleeding inside. Indeed, his suffering was so obvious that his father, in spite of his angry shame, felt a pang of pity—which was absurd in him, because certainly the cub

deserved to suffer! But be that as it may, late that night he made a sort of clutch at his son. It was his wife who gave him his chance. . . . It appears that Mrs. Kay, her spare supper ended, had waited in her usual silence until her husband should finish his abundant meal—which had been rather interrupted by his conversational attack on his son. When he did, he went into his library for some last arrangement of official papers, and she, on her way up to the loft, saw on the hall table a box addressed to “Mrs. Clothespin Kay.” It had been, Jane said afterwards, “lef’ on de do’step.” Standing at the foot of the stairs, in the dim light of the hanging lamp, she opened it, absently. She was so pre-occupied with dread lest Arthur’s courage would break under the pressure of his father’s sarcasm, that she did not notice the tremor in the box—a little muffled movement which ought to have warned her that it held something alive. So, all unprepared, she lifted the lid; instantly, a mouse leaped out—flew up her arm, ran down her other arm, jumped—and was gone. Agnes Kay shrieked, and gathered her narrow skirts about her ankles. It was all over in a second. The Major came running from his library; Arthur tore downstairs and, as the mouse scuttled from under a chair, he fell upon it, clutching its squirming, wriggling little body in his hand; then, holding it up by the tail, he burst out laughing. It was the first good honest laugh that had sounded in

that melancholy house for months—but Kay turned upon him.

“Stop that! Your mother is frightened—kill the thing! Agnes, it won’t hurt you—” His wife, her lips ashen, shook her head:

“Don’t kill it. I”—she shuddered—“I must hold it. I—am ashamed. Give it to me.” She held out a shaking hand. But Kay’s gesture to Arthur saved her from such self-immolation, and the mouse was thrown out into the September dusk. She caught at her husband’s arm to steady herself; it was years since they had touched each other, and they stood there, close together, she trembling, he saying, “I wish I knew who sent it to you; I bet it was a woman!”

She said again, meekly, “I am ashamed.” Then she went upstairs, her knees shaking.

George Kay, in his library, closed the door and stood frowning and chewing an unlighted cigar. A grown woman, *afraid of a mouse!* What could you expect of Arthur, with a mother like that?

“If *I* had had anything to do with him, the boy might have gone to the devil, horse, foot and dragoons, just *once*, and then he would have amounted to something,” said George Kay. Which was his simple way of stating a fact as old as the soul, namely, that no man is good who hasn’t in him the capacity for being bad. The Major’s disappointment in Arthur’s uprightness, was almost wistfully paternal,

"Well, I reckon he can't help being—what he is," he thought, hopelessly. . . . "A proper timidity," he reflected, "is nothing to be ashamed of, in a female. It's rather attractive in a pretty girl—but not in a mother of sons!" He wondered for a moment why timidity in a pretty woman attracts a man—until the woman becomes his wife. Then it doesn't. Although, when you come to think of it, Agnes had not been exactly *timid*? He had never known just what she was—that was the fascination of her!—the mystery of a mind, bolted and barred against his simple thought. "And she was lovely," he reminded himself. Then he had a quiver of disgust at the short gray hair.

"I wonder if she cut it off on purpose to make herself plain? These new religions make people do queer things;—make 'em righteous overmuch! No Episcopalian would try to be hideous—not while there was a rouge pot within a mile of her. Well, I'm not complaining—for myself. All men in love are fools and deserve what they get. But the boy—she's run him into her mold!" He sat down and looked over his papers absently; then, suddenly, he said aloud: "I swear I'll break that mold! I'll give him a chance by getting him away from this place—away from her!" He went out into the hall and called "Arthur!"

The boy, in his own room, called back, "Yes, sir?"

"Come here."

He came. In the library the Major, standing on the hearth rug, the old sword on the chimney-breast behind him, was entirely military. "It is a satisfaction, Arthur," he said, "to know that, though you are afraid to hold a rifle, you do dare to hold a mouse." Arthur was silent. "But," Kay went on, "I've been thinking, if you ever do have any inclination to serve your country, perhaps I could get some kind of nice, safe work for you. No fighting. Setting mouse-traps, maybe, in the Commissary Department. Or seamstress work." Arthur's hands clenched. "There's been talk of a civilian corps. It wouldn't pay you as well as molasses."

Instantly Arthur forgot his contempt for his father's bread! He forgot the days of the whisky bottle; he even forgot Mary, up in the loft; he entirely forgot that stab under the fifth rib at the supper table, and he didn't notice the affront of those words "safe" and "pay." "Oh, *could* you?" he said.

For a moment Kay was too pleased to speak. Then he said, "I don't know. But I hear it's been spoken of. If it is put through, and if I could get you in—"

"Oh, Father!"

"Well, don't count on it—yet. I haven't much influence now. Been out of things too long. But I might grease a few wheels—for God's sake don't say I said that!"

"I'd go," Arthur said, "as a—a hod carrier, just to *go!*"

Kay wanted to hug him; instead he clapped him hard on the shoulder. "Damn you—I believe you have a gizzard!" Then, even as he exulted, he remembered the "dose" he had prepared, and felt a little remorse. "Arthur," he began, "the company marches Monday morning, just about the time the stage starts. So why don't you wait over and go the next day—" He stopped. "No," he told himself; "no softening! Let him hold his nose and get it down."

But Arthur was indifferent to the sulphur and molasses of Monday morning's departure. "Oh, I don't mind *that*, if you can just get me a chance."

"Well, we'll see!" the Major said, heartily.

Then a curious thing happened; even while father and son looked at each other—the father deeply stirred, the son wildly excited, something—perhaps the same thing that made Arthur's mother stretch out her hand for the mouse?—made Arthur say, "But war is hellish idiocy, and I will never fight."

Then George Kay swore. "Your mother's got you," he said, and turned on his heel; "I'll have nothing to do with you!"

"But Father," the boy protested; "you said it would be civilian work, not fighting; and I just said I wouldn't fight; I don't see why you're so—provoked."



"I'll tell you why," Kay said, coming back to him; "it's because you haven't got the pluck of a singed hen in you! You are *afraid*, Arthur; that's what's the matter with you. You've always been afraid. When you were thirteen, you ran away from a fight for fear you'd get a bloody nose! And now when I say there's a chance, just a faint chance, for you to get among men—men who have blood in their veins, not milk and water!—you inform me that manliness is idiocy—"

"I did not!" Arthur retorted; "I said war was idiocy. To be exact, I said 'hellish idiocy'—and I don't mind saying it again!"

His father, striding into his bedroom at the end of the library, didn't hear this particular impertinence; he had banged the door in his son's face. Arthur, retreating like a kicked dog, said to himself that if he hadn't the pluck of a hen, his father hadn't the sense of one! "He didn't even know what I was talking about!" he thought contemptuously; "He hasn't the brains in his whole body that mother has in her little finger!" Then he began to sting with mortification because he had been betrayed into that outburst of emotion and entreaty. "I made a fool of myself, letting him see how much I wanted to go."

All that next day the remembrance of what he called his "gush," made him feel sick. He walked up and down the loft, sometimes telling Mary,

curtly, to "Keep quiet!" sometimes stopping to look down through the yellowing pear trees at the Clark house. He could hear Tom and Harry yelling to each other, and once he heard one of them call, "Lois!" "Oh, she's at home!" he thought. Then remembered what was going to happen on Monday; "she's come back to see the twins off," he thought, wincing. . . . "If I could just see her!" For a minute his reticence wore thin and he had an impulse to tell her how his father had treated him. Then he knew he wouldn't tell her; he couldn't tell anybody! He saw Tom and Harry run down the road to the parade ground for the last drill, and by and by come back. A minute later, from the open windows of the Clarks' parlor, came the sound of the piano, and the boys' voices roaring out the latest war song, Lois' fresh soprano dancing through their bass:

"He'll show the foe no quarter  
(McClellan is the man I mean);  
You know he hadn't oughter—  
For he's gone down to Washington  
To fight for Abraham's daughter!"

Arthur, listening, said, passionately—"Father *could* have done it—and he won't, just because I said what I thought of war!" His face was haggard with his longing for that human birthright of struggle, which so far transcends the later gift of reason. He did not reflect that civil work for

military purposes is also war. Which failure in logic only goes to show that he was human.

When his mother came home from church and saw how pale he was, she again asked him if he felt sick (of course he hadn't told her of that interview with his father). He said, moodily, "No"; at that moment from the Clark house came Lois' voice:

"Oh, should you ask me who she am,  
Columbia is her name, sir—"

Perhaps Agnes Kay heard the foolish, valiant words, and guessed how they pulled at the boy's heart, for later, when she brought up Mary's dinner, she asked him in her brief way if he would dig a pit for her in the garden, "under the old plum tree, over by the black currant bushes. I may want to bury the silver—there is talk of raids." She spoke as calmly as if planning for gardening, instead of war; but she was thinking, "It will get him out-of-doors. . . . I can't find anyone who is willing to work for me," she explained—there was no resentment in her voice—"and it would take so long for me to dig a hole myself."

"*You* dig? Mother! What an awful idea! Yes of course I'll do it. I wish I knew who sent that devilish mouse to you," he added; "I'd like to horse-whip 'em."

"The Buttricks have come back from Philadelphia," she said; the connection of ideas was obvious;

"I sometimes think he is inclined to be timid, Arthur?"

Arthur shouted with laughter. "Timid? He's the biggest coward in town—except me." . . . He went down through the silent house, skulking past his father's door. Old fat Rover, on the sunny flagstones by the kitchen porch, caught sight of him and came trundling along behind him to the plum tree, where they sat down for a while in the still September sunshine. Rover, nose between paws, snoozed, and Arthur watched the wasps hovering about and settling on the fallen plums; he kept thinking of his father, baiting him with hope, then, simply because Arthur didn't agree with him about war, snatching hope from him! Of course he had no conception of the hope that had been snatched from his father. He had nothing but angry contempt for his father.

By and by he went to work, shoveling and shoveling into the dry earth. The pit was almost dug when suddenly he heard Lois' voice. She was standing, a bright figure against the sky, looking down at him, knee-deep in the hole.

"What *are* you doing?" she said. In her spreading flounces, she was like a white bell all ready to ring little chimes of gayety and friendliness. "I came tearing home as soon as I heard our twins were to go off to-morrow! Are you digging a well?"

He told her it was a pit to bury the silver—"in

case the rebels come." Lois, sobering at the word, said, "Oh, Arthur, how awful war is!"

"It's worse than awful. It's idiocy." His face hardened. ("I'm glad I told Father that," he thought, "but I wish I'd said something more insulting than 'hellish'.") He climbed out of the hole and stood beside her, spade in hand.

"You'll go sometime, won't you, Arthur?" she said.

He didn't answer her. Suddenly, as he looked at her, his heart had thumped, then seemed to turn over, and with a pang of almost agonizing bliss he knew that this longing for he hadn't known what, this glow right under his breastbone, which he had felt ever since the day she had held his hand as if it were a suffering thing—was love. But he only said:

"I didn't know that you would be willing to talk to me; Rover is about the only person who speaks to me in this town."

"Why, Arthur Kay—you entire goose!"

"Well, I didn't know." His face twitched.

"Why, but you *know* I understand that—that you can't help hating war."

"Lois," he said; he was crumbling up the earth on the shining edge of his spade, and again she saw that his hand trembled; "Lois, you know, I—I love you."

She caught her red lip between her teeth, and just looked at him.

"Do you love me?"

"I—don't know."

"I don't suppose you do."

"Why, but maybe I do. Only, I—never thought—"

"I won't fight," he reminded her; "I *can't* fight." He held his breath to hear her scorn; but there was no scorn.

"I know you can't," she said; "you've always been—that way." Then she smiled and came close to him and lifted her face. He kissed her.

"We're in love!" His voice shook with wonder. Rover lifted an eyebrow.

"Are we?" Lois said, amazed.

"Yes!" he said—and kissed her again. "Oh—I don't mind anything, now!"

She was breathless. "I never thought of such a thing!"

Except for the whir of the wasps flying about the plums, everything was still in the September haze. Then the boy said, "We're engaged."

"Are we?" she said; "but I'm not seventeen till next February! I'm afraid Mother won't let me; but that won't make any difference. I will be engaged, if you want to—Oh, Tom's calling me!" She turned to run home, paused, came back, gave his hand a squeeze. "I will *always* be engaged—" and flew out across the sunshine to her searching



brothers. Rover disturbed, sat up and snapped at a wasp.

Arthur Kay, in a daze, got back into his pit. "She loves me," he was saying; "*she loves me.*"

The next morning, just at stage-time, the George Kay company formed in front of the tavern. Then, with the captain on horseback, with flag flying and fifes tooting and drum beating, the boys marched down the road toward Mercer. Just ahead of them went the stage, carrying a few elderly people who wanted to go a mile or two with their soldiers, and who would then walk back to Old Chester. And it carried also, on the front seat, squeezed in between Silas, the driver, and a proudly shouting grandfather—the captain's only son. Along the roadside, pressing as close as they could to the marching boys, were the old men and children, and the women—a few wives, many mothers, and many, many sisters and sweethearts.

Dr. and Mrs. King were among them, Martha beaming, William pallid and worn. He had faced, and fought against, and finally surrendered to, the hard, inglorious duty of staying at home—because he was the only doctor in a circuit of twenty miles. But the struggle with himself left him melancholy, and inclined to be curt with his greatly relieved Martha. Sam Dane, his paralyzed foot dragging in the dust, trudged along with the women; he had

tried three times to get into the company, but of course couldn't be taken; and the nearly blind Hough boy was there, hiding his tears of disappointment by continually blowing his nose. Mrs. Buttrick was on hand, of course, telling everybody that she hoped by next year her Bobby's stummick would be so he could volunteer; and Bobby himself tagged at her heels. Ellen Clark, laughing very much, the beautiful color hot in her cheeks, paced with the escorting group. Once, glancing at Mrs. Kay, who was walking quite alone, she said significantly to Mr. Benjamin Wright, "I don't like these queer religions!"—to which the old gentleman, pausing in the midst of a satyrish compliment, snarled, "Neither does the Devil!" and went to hobble silently along by Agnes Kay.

Lois kept up with the stage, running alongside, then pausing to look back at her brothers or any of the boys she knew, calling to them, and teasing them, throwing kisses, and making promises as to writing letters, or any other gay foolishness that could hide the tremor of her heart—for, oh, that silent figure on the front seat! Once she did a dreadfully bold thing; running out into the road she reached up, caught at George Kay's hand resting on the hilt of his sword, and whispered, "*Please* be nice to Arthur!" That soft squeeze from little fingers made the deeply ashamed father's eyes blur for a minute. But he only said, very low, and bending

down so that no one else could hear him: "You must make a soldier of him, Pretty Dear!"

When at last the coach drew up to let the elderly people alight, Lois did another distressingly unlady-like thing: springing on to the hub of the front wheel—her hoop skirt tilting out behind so that her little legs in their white stockings *could be seen!*—she reached her hand up to Arthur. She didn't speak, and he, too, was dumb; they just looked into each other's eyes. Then the marching boys overtook them, islanding the old coach for a few minutes in youth and valor. Then:

"Forward—*march!*"

"Good-by!—Good-by!—Good-by!" . . . And they were gone. The stage followed, then jogged on ahead. And women and children, and old men and sickly boys, standing by the roadside in the cloud of dust, watched until a turn in the road, or blurring eyes, hid everything but that following cloud. The last Old Chester sound the Clark twins heard was their mother's splendid rallying laughter. . . . When in twos and threes the little group started to walk back, there were continual pauses to turn and look at that cloud settling on the goldenrod and asters; pauses to listen to fainter and fainter strains of

Yankee Doodle came to town  
Riding on a pony—

There was much determined smiling, and a few patriotic flippancies. To be sure, some of the women's hands clenched in the gathers of their spreading flounces, but there were no tears (until, perhaps, the mothers were alone). Bobby Buttrick, walking beside Lois, told her he'd got a new kind of pill from a *real* doctor in Philadelphia, so that he hoped he'd be well enough to enlist by next spring. "But I guess the war'll be over by that time," he added hopefully, and whistled, "Oh let us chant in perfect tune"—

They had fallen behind the others, for Fatty couldn't keep up with them. "Let's sit down and rest," he suggested.

"You can, if you want to," Lois said; "*I* can't! I've got to get home and put the boys' things in order—you never saw such untidy boys as our twins!"

"I should think Arthur Kay would feel queer," Bobby said. "I don't see how he had the face to go off on the stage! I'd have stayed at home, if I'd been well and strong, like him."

"Probably *you* would," Lois said, angrily; "but Arthur would go to his work."

Bobby shrugged a shoulder and was silent. Lois was silent, too. "Oh," she was thinking, "I do hope Mother won't be displeased when I tell her!" She was so absorbed in love and apprehension that she

didn't notice Bobby, clearing his throat, then laughing, then clearing his throat again:

"Say, Lois—"

She had forgotten him; she had turned and was looking back at a stretch of road, winding up a hill. Perhaps she might see the stage. Then, suddenly, an arm around her waist—a hot breath—whiskers on the corner of her mouth: "*I'm awfully in love with you!*" . . . Instantly Bobby Buttrick's face was slapped so furiously that he yelped, "*Ouch!*"—and Lois, running down the road, forgot her brothers, forgot even her departing lover—forgot everything, except that she had been insulted by that horrid, nasty boy! She called over her shoulder, "Arthur'll kill you—and so will the twins!" and ran, and ran, and ran, until she caught up with her mother. Her eyes blazed so, and her face was so red, that Ellen Clark stood still, amazed.

"Lois! What is the matter? It is unladylike to run so hard!"

Lois, gasping, said, "I was just trying to catch up with you—" She didn't speak again, in all that long walk home; she just kept scrubbing her lips with a little hard wad of a pocket handkerchief. "If Arthur had been there," she was thinking, "he'd have knocked him down and tramped on him! I wish I'd done it myself!" She made up her mind that the first thing she would do when Arthur came

back, next week, would be to tell him—"And he'll just entirely kill him!"

When she and her mother reached their own door, Mrs. Clark was quite concerned at the redness of Lois' cheek. "Something has bitten you," she said.

"Yes," Lois agreed, viciously; "but I slapped it!"

In the new silence of the house, she ran about putting things to rights; and by and by the sight of the boys' possessions made her forget Bobby. She began to scold, adoringly: "Imps—leaving everything topsy-turvy in their rooms. I'll give it to 'em when they get home!" she promised herself. The dear security of the old, happy fault-finding, and the thought of the two manly brothers, brought the tears. Then she remembered Arthur—but that made her think of Bobby. And *that* made her sing—

"We'll have a row with Johnny Bull—  
And don't you think we oughter—  
If he is caught at any time  
Insulting Abraham's daughter?"

She stamped to emphasize "insulting" . . . Ellen Clark, listening, smiled as well as she could; but she couldn't laugh now, and the proud color had drained out of her face. She was longing to go upstairs, and lock her door, and be alone. But first there had to be the endless evening in the parlor with Lois, sitting under the astral lamp, talking of nothing in particu-



lar and remembering things she had forgotten to do for the twins; looking at the clock and saying, "Oh, is it only eight? I thought it was nine!" or, "Isn't it half past, *yet?*" And over and over: "I wonder where they are, now?" But at last it was ten, and the mother and daughter could go upstairs, through the deadly emptiness of a house which for weeks had rung with boyish footsteps and laughter. Ellen was suffocating with her desire for solitude. "I may never see either of them again," she was saying to herself; she wanted to fall on her knees, and cry out "God! bring them back to me. Bring them *both* back to me!" In the upper hall she paused at Lois' door to kiss the child and say, "Good night, honey. Do put some soda on that bite! And don't worry about the boys."

"Oh, I'm not in the least worried," said Lois, scrubbing Bobby's kiss with her handkerchief; "I'm only afraid the war will be over before they get into it!" The lamp in her left hand shook; her other hand was on her door knob: "Mother, I—I want to tell you something—sort of—exciting. I'm engaged."

"You're *what?*"

"Engaged."

In sheer amazement Mrs. Clark lifted her own lamp so that its light fell on the pretty face—a little frightened now, but laughing. "What are you talking about? 'Engaged?' You?" The ridiculousness

of it made her laugh, in spite of herself; "To whom, if you please?"—but she added, without waiting for an answer, "Don't be foolish, Lois! You are far too young to think of such things. But who—?"

"Arthur," said Lois, in a whisper.

Her mother was too astounded to speak. Then: "*Arthur Kay?* Who would rather make money selling molasses, than fight for his country?—and your two brothers marching to-day!"

"I love him, Mother."

"You don't know the meaning of the word!—a child like you. But, oh, you betray your brothers. Arthur Kay—of all people in the world!"

"I am sorry," Lois said, in a little gasping voice, "that you feel that way. Because I—I'm engaged to him."

"No, Lois; you can't be engaged without my consent, and I will never give it."

"I am," said Lois.

Mrs. Clark was stupefied—and no wonder! Probably a colloquy like this had never been heard in Old Chester—a girl saying "I will," when her mother said "You shall not." There was a pause, owing to Mrs. Clark's inability to find words, then she said: "The subject is closed. You are *not* engaged to him. And I also want to tell you that saying good-by to him on the stage, before everybody, as you did, was most immodest and unladylike. Everybody saw 'way above your ankles! I was *very*

mortified. Remember, you are not to think of him again. I forbid you to do so." Lois' lamp wavered so in her hand that her mother steadied it. "Go to your room, and kneel down and pray to God to make you an obedient girl—and a repentant girl, too!" (Parents really talked that way, then—in Old Chester.)

Lois, speechless, slipped into her room and closed the door. As for poor Ellen, in her own room—"On top of everything else!" she said to herself. And sat down and tried to get her breath: "My Lois!" she said, —"and her father died for his country!" The tears and prayers she had longed for were burned up by anger at Arthur and amazement at Lois. "A girl of *mine!*"

As for Lois, she did indeed kneel and pray to God, but what she said was:

"*'Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray'*—(Please, please make him happier! Oh, *I* don't mind his being afraid. He can't help it)—*'the Lord my soul to keep'*—(He just can't help hating war. Make him brave. Please, *please* make him not so wretched.) *'If I should die before I wake, I pray the Lord'*—(I'll love him forever and ever. And I just entirely hate Bobby!)—*'my soul to take. For Jesus' sake. Amen!'*"

## *Chapter Six*

AS THE next morning did not bring any sign of that repentance for which Lois had been bidden to pray, her mother became a little worried, because, even in those days when children still obeyed their parents, it was difficult to know how to treat a daughter who would not repent when commanded to do so. You can't spank a girl "seventeen years old next February!" To shut her up in her room on bread and water was possible; but Ellen Clark had an uneasy feeling that this astonishing Lois, who had never, until now, had an idea of her own might, under too much severity—well, heaven knows what she might do! Write to Arthur, perhaps? Possibly the wise thing was just to look displeased and treat the affair as something too foolish to talk about?

To Lois those next six days before Arthur could come home were very long, and every day she thought of how she would tell him that no matter what her mother said, she was "engaged"; and she would tell him please not to be unhappy because he hadn't volunteered;—that she didn't mind it, one single bit. And that Bobby Buttrick was a reptile! "Arthur will horsewhip him," she thought proudly, and sang under her breath:

“And don’t you think we oughter?  
If he is caught at any time  
Insulting Abraham’s daughter?”

Also, there was a whisper in the back entry (the child had to tell somebody, and the *New York Ledger* made Emma so understanding!). “Oh, Emma, I’m engaged”—then her slender arms around Emma’s big neck, and a kiss from the fresh lips. “Lovey! Lovey!” said Emma delightedly.

To Arthur, in the vast duskiness of barrels and hogsheads, where the air was pungent with the smell of molasses, and reflections from the river below his unwashed windows rippled back and forth on the ceiling of his little pen, the six days were all a passion of eagerness to get home—to look again into Lois’ eyes, and read in them her certainty that he was not a coward; to hold her hand—to kiss her!

To Mrs. Clark, the week was full of the annoyance of having to think of a girl’s foolishness, when she ought to be thinking of important things—damson jam, and dressmaking, and letters to Tom and Harry. She would, she told herself impatiently, just keep an eye on Lois from the time the boy arrived on Saturday until he went off on Monday. Saturday came, and her eye, being on Lois, could not be on Emma, too; which made it possible for Emma (after being again kissed in the back entry) to slip a note, all about plum trees and currant bushes, to Betsey, who slipped it to Arthur, who slipped his note back,

all about some work he must do for his mother that night, but the *next*—the plum tree! the currant bushes! “Or, if it rains, your carriage-house.” Well, those are details. Ellen Clark did, with faithful displeasure, watch her girl; watch her every minute! Watch her until, Sunday evening, Lois, saying good night (rather earlier than usual), went to her room—presumably again to kneel down and pray for “repentance”; which occupation was in itself a reason why the shed roof, sloping conveniently up to her window need not be watched! But Mrs. Clark would have considered *that* an insult to a properly brought up girl! Anyhow, seeing her daughter safely on her way to bed, she sat down to write letters to the twins. And while she wrote, Lois—in a listening tremor—stepped over her window sill; stepped out on to that sloping roof; crept; slid; found the lattice thick with woodbine—and oh, it creaked! it swayed!—and, oh, hoop skirts are dreadful for climbing!

So this incredible and unrepentant Old Chester girl—taking the initiative in lovernaking with pure and exquisite shamelessness—reached the ground, stood panting, stepped softly past the parlor window, through which (pausing for a moment of remorse) she saw her trusting mother at the big rosewood table, under the lamp hung with prisms, writing to Tom and Harry. “Oh, I am a very wicked girl,” said Lois, sighing. Then, slowly,



one pussy-cat step after another—and she had reached the wall and Arthur's arms! Ah, dear black Betsey—dear white Emma.

In the achievement of the starlit hour with Arthur, Bobby—"Insulting Abraham's daughter"—was not spoken of at once. Her few precious moments couldn't be wasted on Bobby! She had to say that her mother had said she was "too young"; and Arthur had to say that he hadn't told his mother, yet. "But they can't say *I'm* too young! I'll be nineteen my next birthday."

"Mother says she'll never consent, because you didn't volunteer." He frowned, and she added, calmly: "Oh, that's nothing! I don't mind. You know I understand. And I will be engaged as long as I live."

"Then nothing matters, Lois. Nothing matters, if you love me!"

"I do love you—forever and ever, amen." She put her slim arms around his neck and kissed him. How did she know how to make love, there under the stars, with such pure abandon—this little sixteen-year-old girl? Perhaps in the same way a nesting bird knows how to fly! George Kay would have called such unashamed sweetness the Holy Ghost. Arthur felt faint under the innocent rapture of it. "Oh, I mustn't stay!" she said, her head pressing against his pulsing throat; "Mother might come upstairs and find I'm not there, though I

locked my door, so she can't get in. But she might try. And if she should hear me climbing up on to the shed—*Oh!*” Then, suddenly, she remembered Bobby. “Arthur! I forgot to tell you something perfectly awful. Bobby Buttrick is a reptile! I hate him. He—oh, I'm so mad when I think of it—he kissed me! Right on the corner of my mouth. I told him you'd entirely kill him.”

Arthur's furious exclamation warmed her like a flame; “I knew you'd horsewhip him!”

“I'll give him such a hiding,” Arthur said, “that he'll be afraid to—to walk on your side of the world!”

Lois said delightedly, “Will you fight a duel—like your father? Emma says they always do, in stories.”

Arthur, in spite of his rage, laughed. “Oh, it's only Southerners who fight duels. Anyway, Fatty isn't worth powder and shot. Even kicking is too good for Fatty—but that's what he'll get! Though maybe I'll *show* him a pistol. Just to scare him. He's a coward, you know. Like me.”

She winced. “Oh, Arthur, don't say that!”

“I am,” he insisted, carelessly; “everybody in Old Chester knows it.”

“I love you just the same!” she said—and flung her arms around him and kissed him. People were unkind to him! She was all flaming defense: “I'd just like to kill anybody who is horrid to you!” Of

course, black being black to Lois, and white, white, the irony of calling yourself black when you were white was unintelligible; yet even while she (so to speak) kissed the place to make it well, she did wish he wouldn't *say* he was a coward.

"No amount of pounding a creature like Bobby will make him decent," Arthur said; "but I'll kick him all over this town!" Then, suddenly, he frowned. His Pledge to Peace? "I don't care, I will!" he told himself. "Don't let's think of the 'hound," he said; "let's talk about You! Oh, Lois . . . I would be willing to die now, because I've been in heaven for an hour."

"An *hour*? Have I been here an hour? I must tear home—"

He knew she ought to go, but he could not let her go! When she did, at last, draw away from him, they went, their arms about each other—like the picture in *Paul et Virginie*—to the wall where, because he had to help her down from the coping, there was another moment on his breast; then softly, softly, still like Paul and Virginia, they stole under the pear trees, through the shrubbery, past the windows of the parlor, where Ellen Clark was still writing to her soldier sons. Lois, peering through the bushes, gave another unrepentant sigh. At the latticed ladder of the woodbine they kissed each other, and Bobby did not exist for either of them!

Then little Lois climbed—up and up; on to the roof; over to the window; into her room.

So that was the love of these two children. In the girl it was a single, perfect thing—unreasoning tenderness. In the boy it was two things, two alien things!—passion and reason. Her love did not depend upon his desert; but half of his love did depend upon hers.

That night, in their own rooms, the two so different loves possessed the lovers. Lois put out her lamp and in her little high-necked, long-sleeved nightgown sat at her window, looking over at the Kay house—all black except for a glimmer in the loft. Arthur's room was on the other side of the great, dark house, but he was there—probably looking at the stars as she was looking at them, and thinking of her! Did he have this same strange ache of joy under the breast-bone that she had? He couldn't have quite the glow of pride that she had in being engaged! "Because I'm only a girl and don't know a quarter of the things he does. And he's so good-looking. And he is so big!" Why, he lifted her from the top of the wall as if she was a kitten. And, oh, he would simply break every bone in Bobby Buttrick's body—nasty boy! How she hated him—"*Insulting Abraham's daughter*"! The thought of Arthur's strength in breaking Bobby's bones made her thrill with delightful terror. And people would see him kicking Bobby all

over town! Well, perhaps not *all* over town. Down the street would be enough. "Then nobody will ever dare to call him a 'coward' again!" Her love, which was still a child's love, glowed with pride! Then she thought of her mother. "Nothing Mother can say will make any difference. I'd die rather than break my engagement." But she said this like a woman, not a child.

Arthur was not looking at the stars; he was sitting, frowning, on the edge of his bed, a heel in his boot-jack; his anger at Bobby Buttrick had been far hotter than Lois knew. He wanted to kill him; he wanted to put his hands around Bobby's fat neck and hold him, struggling and grunting and choking. "Beast!" Arthur thought, remembering Lois' lips. "I'll thrash him until he's half dead!" and triumphantly he kicked a noisy boot on to the floor! Then, suddenly, there came again that small, icy thought that had stabbed him when he was with Lois. His Pledge to Peace? "Oh, well, this is different. Lois has been insulted; I've *got* to thrash him!" Then more icy thoughts: "Kicking him won't make him ashamed; it will only make him mad." And—and his "Word to Christ"? . . . His fingers, sinking, in imagination, into Bobby's throat, relaxed. He drew a long breath, and pulled his other boot off very quietly. "It's childish to be so mad. Might as well be mad at a hog for being a hog." His face hardened. "It's no good to thrash

him. The thing to do is to *tell* him he's a skunk. Yes, I'll tell him he can no more insult Lois than he can insult a—a star! I'll tell him he's not worth kicking." Of course this didn't come all at once; in spite of reason and his Pledge there were returning waves of human nature. But by and by he blew out his lamp and got into bed. "I'm a fool," he said, sheepishly. His swelling balloon of fury had been pricked by the small pin of common sense; he even grinned a little in the dark, to think what an ass he would have looked, "kicking Fatty all over town"! But he'd fix the hound! He'd see him before the stage started the next morning, and tell him what he thought of him. . . . Arthur didn't sleep very much that night, thinking up scathing words in which to express his opinion! Before breakfast he started out, breathing forth threatenings, if not slaughter, only to be told at the Buttricks' door that Mr. Robert was away. "His mother's took him to Philadelphia again, to see the doctor," said the Buttricks' maid. So all Arthur could do was to compose, on the stage that morning, a letter to Mr. Robert! But when he got to Mercer and sat down at the high desk in his glass pen among the hogsheads, he wrote first to Lois (when he should have been entering invoices of molasses). It was a clumsy, boyish letter—but in the middle of it was a new word—a word he had never used in all his life, never in all his life heard addressed to himself;



a word he had read in stories. The word DARLING. Arthur, looking at that word in his own handwriting, felt almost dizzy. But on the next line he was laconic again;

I'm not going to fight Bobby. I've thought it over. Fighting is ridiculous. Doesn't accomplish anything. Anyway, I'm so mad I'm afraid to. I don't want to kill him. It's safer just to write to him that any fellow who kisses a girl against her will is too low down to kick.

His letter to Bobby, embodying this idea, caused that young man to tell his mother, agitatedly, that Arthur Kay was a dangerous person! "And I'm going to keep out of his way," said Bobby, panting. The letter to Lois—her first love letter except, of course, the scrap Arthur had sent her through Betsey, through Emma, about the plum tree—gave her a hot thrill in her breast. Then came the last lines: "Fighting is ridiculous. Anyway . . . I'm afraid to. . . . It's safer to write."

"Oh!" Lois said, aghast. She read it all over again; read the new Word that stood out on the page like a jewel; then put the letter to her lips and kissed the word. But she felt strangely empty, inside. Her triumph of the night before in his glorious rage, her pride in having all Bobby's bones broken, seemed to run out of her knees. . . . Arthur was so mad, he was afraid to fight! And he didn't *want* to kill Bobby. That was incredible—not to

want to! Lois couldn't understand it. "Of course, I wouldn't have him entirely kill him," she said; "but I don't see how he can help wanting to kill him." By and by she said, under her breath: "But I don't mind. I love him just the same." Then she read the letter through for the third time; it was "safer" to write to Bobby. . . . Lois felt a sinking tremor of astonishment. Oh, no one must ever know that! Nobody must ever suspect that Arthur, instead of giving Bobby a thrashing, had just sat down at a desk and written a letter—because it was the safe thing to do! If the twins should ever know it—"But they never shall! I'll never tell anybody. He can't help it."

The next day she wrote to him, in her unformed, childish hand: "It's all right about your not fighting Bobby. I don't mind a bit. Harry will do it when he gets home. And we will be engaged, because I love you, forever . . . Darling."

She never sang "Abraham's Daughter" again.

It was a day or two later that her own fighting began. She didn't think of it as a fight—it was only her idea of what was right: she told her mother of that meeting in the starry darkness of the garden. "It was Sunday night," she said, "and—and I went over to see Arthur—"

*"What!"*

"I—I wanted to see him."

The mother and daughter were in the cheerful,

red-papered parlor, full of the dear domesticity of comfortable furniture hiding its shabbiness under tidies and antimacassars. Ellen had been moving about in the sunshine from the western windows, experimenting as to where to place a photograph of the twins in uniform. On the mantelpiece? On the lacquered workstand, all inlaid with mother-of-pearl? "I never open the old thing! The boys used to play with those carved spools when they had just begun to creep." Or how would it look on top of the bookcase, beside the stuffed cedar waxwings under their glass dome? "I'm afraid the whatnot is too full for anything more," she said, anxiously regarding china dogs and *millefiori* paper weights, and an airy "Castle in Spain" of perforated cardboard and ribbons, hanging from the top shelf. She could put it on the center table, she reflected; perhaps on the big Bible, which held the happy date of their birth, nineteen years ago—in red ink! "We never open it, either," Ellen said, and propped the picture up on the gilt embossed cover; "it looks well, honey, there?" she said, stepping back to consider it. "No! I believe the mantelpiece is best," she decided.

It was at that moment that Lois dropped her bombshell: "I went over—"

When her mother got her breath she said, astounded, "Do you mean to tell me that you deliberately disobeyed me?"

"Oh no, Mother. You didn't tell me I mustn't."

"I didn't tell you you were not to—to do any wicked, unladylike thing! But you knew that it was wrong; you knew that I would not allow it. Well, I tell you now. And I tell you, also—I am mortified that it is necessary!—that you are not to write to him." They stood looking at each other; the twins' photograph in Ellen's hands, and Lois rolling her handkerchief into a limp twist, then stretching it out, then rolling it up again. "You will promise me you won't write to him."

Lois said, faintly, "No, I won't." It was possible to promise this, even though her knees trembled and she almost dropped her handkerchief; because, why should she write to him? He would be at home on Saturdays—and the roof, and the trellis and the stars would all be there! If her mother should ask for a promise about *that*—!

And of course Mrs. Clark did ask it: "And you will promise me that you won't see him. It is humiliating to me, Lois, to ask for such a promise from your father's daughter, your brothers' sister!"—she looked at the photograph—"but your conduct has been so terribly improper—showing your legs up to your pantalettes, and squeezing his hand before everybody!—that I have no choice. Promise me you won't see him."

There was a dead silence; it almost seemed as if Mrs. Clark must hear the wild beating of the young heart. Then: "No," Lois said, "I . . . won't."

Now, would any mother (in the 'sixties) have seen through those dutiful, deceiving words? Would she have been quick enough to say, "Won't—*what?* 'Promise'? or 'see him'?" A mother could take that "won't" either way! Mrs. Clark took it in the most obvious way; yet even so, Lois' next words were a shock—"But we are engaged."

Ellen Clark, looking at the set young face, had the experience—not unknown to mothers of sixteen-year-old girls—of discovering, in her own daughter, a perfect stranger; an obstinate woman instead of a yielding child! But she only said: "If he writes to you, you are not to read his letters. You will give them to me, and I will return them to him, unopened. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Mother. I understand."

"Lois, I must have your word about this, or I shall be obliged to go to the post office and ask Miss Minns not to give you any mail that may come to you—which would be very mortifying to me." (It was Lois' duty to go for the mail, so this precaution was obviously wise.) "You are not to read any letters that horrible boy may be foolish enough to write. If you disobey me, I shall send you to the Priory." The Priory was a boarding school of the 'fifties and 'sixties, where many Old Chester girls were sent to be instructed in religion and deportment—and singularly little else besides. "I must have your promise, Lois." Mrs. Clark put the pic-

ture of her soldiers on the mantelpiece, and waited, red faced and stern.

Lois promised. Quickly and easily, and without any hidden meaning in her words, for she felt sure he wouldn't write to her! He would just *talk* to her, on Saturdays and Sundays.

Then, having promised, she fled to her room, where she was sustained by thoughts of the roof. But in the middle of the week the unexpected happened—a letter actually did come from Arthur. As for what it contained—only a botanist tears a violet open to see its heart! And the boy's love letter shall not be torn open. How delicate and fiery, how foolish and how wise, young love letters are! In this letter Arthur had hardly taken time or space to say he wasn't coming to Old Chester this next Saturday because Mr. Watson was sending him to Columbus about something or other; but the *next* Saturday—"I'll be in the garden at nine!" Oh, the detail (all set with that jewel word) of expectation of the garden! There is no place like a garden for lovers. Indeed, the first lovers were put into a garden. But Lois did not break the seal and read the lovely words. Her obedience, now, seems rather incredible. But the command, also, is incredible now. Certainly, then, parental authority imperiled children's morals by making them either deceitful or cowardly—or both. It made little frightened, faithful Lois—who voluntarily con-

fessed to the dark, beautiful hour under the plum tree—delude her mother by the ambiguity of *not* promising not to see Arthur. But she had not been ambiguous about writing to him or reading his letters; “I won’t,” she had said, unequivocally. And she didn’t. She neither wrote nor read. But neither did she give her mother that unopened letter to return to the horrible boy. She had made no promise about *that!* She had only said she “understood”—and understanding doesn’t commit you to anything. So when his letter came, she took it out of the pigeonhole in the post office and put it in her pocket. At home, her door locked, she made a little silk bag out of an old sash ribbon, and slipped the still sealed envelope into it—kissing it first. She put in also the precious scrap of paper which Emma had brought her about the plum tree, and the note—her first real “love letter,” which came before she promised not to read his letters—the one in which he said he was “afraid” to fight Bobby Buttrick. Then she pulled the drawing string, and put the bag under her little left white breast.

But Arthur did not come home that next Saturday; he wrote, instead; so there were two unopened letters in the bag; and every night when she said her prayers, she kissed each one separately. Perhaps the promise not to read them was easier to keep because Emma had said (in a whisper, in the back entry) that Betsey said, that Mrs. Kay said,



that Mr. Arthur had had to go farther west for Mr. Watson. Then, too, still in whispers, she learned that Betsey had sent Mr. Arthur some pot-hooks—Emma called it a letter!—to the effect that Miss Lois “wernt let to rite nothin ner reed nothin so it wernt no good fer him to rite to her.”

“It was me told her to drop him a line, lovey,” Emma said. Thanks to the *New York Ledger*, Emma knew just what to do under the circumstances.

“A pious *Ledger* story,” Emma had often said, “that you can read on the Sabbath, ’bout the nobility, with plenty of sad loving in it, is a real edjycation to a body who has to stand over a stove all day.” But Ellen Clark had no idea of Emma’s education, and kitchen whispers as to Arthur’s whereabouts never reached her ears. Also, to her great relief, no letters were given her to return to that cowardly boy—who did not come home on the Saturday stage! Ellen kept watch on that so she felt that Providence was on her side, and Lois would soon get over her foolishness.

Then, suddenly, she forgot to be grateful to Providence; she forgot Lois’ behavior; she even forgot Lois. . . . For something happened—something beside which worry over a girl’s foolishness would have been happiness. . . .

## Chapter Seven

IT HAD been such a pleasant day! It came after an especially anxious week, when men's hearts were failing them for fear of those terrible "Lists" in the newspapers, which were growing longer and longer. But by this time, seven days after the battle of Ball's Bluff, Old Chester said to itself, "None of *our* boys can have been hurt, or we would have heard before this." So apprehension was pretty much over, and Ellen Clark, on this blue October day, had been cheerfully busy with her quince jelly, which was stiffening into topaz sweetness. "It ought to be darker, Emma, but it's good," Mrs. Clark said. "I wish I could send some to Tom, he's *so* fond of it; but"—then came her loud, sweet laugh—"imagine jelly, in a mail bag!" Yes, that autumn day of cloudless skies and the smell of boiling quinces in the house, was entirely pleasant. . . . "I'll get the mail," Ellen told her daughter, in the afternoon, "and I'll take a tumbler of jelly to Miss Minns."

But Lois said, quickly, "Oh, I'll get it!" for she wasn't quite sure that Betsey's pot-hooks had been received, so he *might* have written! "I'll go to the post office."

"No, you needn't, honey," her mother said. "I

have to send some money to Harry, anyhow." So, under full sail of spreading barége skirts—green and brown in circular stripes, and with an embroidered green crêpe shawl drooping from her shoulders, she started down the street, the tumbler of jelly in her hand.

But Lois, terrified at the possibilities of the letter box, ran out of the back door, took a short cut across the Kay garden, and somehow got to the post office first. . . . But Arthur must have heard from Betsey, for there was no letter from him, so she might have saved herself her panting run. As she stood there getting her breath she saw Miss Minns coming out from behind the rack of pigeonholes to tack something up on the wall. Lois said, "*Oh—!*" for she knew what it was that the postmistress sometimes pinned on the wall. . . . Miss Minns, the newspaper rustling in her hands, saw her, and instantly the tears ran down her face. "Oh, Lois, my *dear*," she said.

"Not—not one of our twins?" Lois said, faintly.

Miss Minns, instead of answering, turned and scuttled back behind the pigeonholes, leaving the newspaper fluttering on one tack—for she had caught sight of Ellen Clark coming, smiling, down the street. "I can't see her read it!" Miss Minns said. She had seen other women read those papers; she knew just what happened when a wife or mother, coming in to get her mail, saw one of the flimsy

sheets, with their blunt, smudgy type. First there was the start; then the changing face—the faint exclamation; then, hurried steps over to the paper, to stand in front of it and run a finger down the columns of names. But she did not know what would happen if the finger paused—for as yet no Old Chester name had been in any of those lists:

<i>Killed</i>	<i>Wounded</i>	<i>Missing</i>
....	....	....
....	....	....

When Ellen Clark, her handsome head high, the color from the kitchen stove still hot in her cheeks, and her smile that made you think of banners in the wind—came sweeping into the office, saying, “I want to register a letter to Harry, Miss Minns, and I’ve brought you some of my quince jelly,”—kind old Miss Minns had disappeared. Behind the pigeon-holes, she was saying to herself, quivering, “My! my!” and peering through the delivery window to see that start—that changing face—that moving finger. . . . “*My! my!*” said Miss Minns.

Mrs. Clark saw her daughter before she saw the newspaper. “Why, honey, I told you I’d get the mail,” she said.

Then the paper, fluttering in the draught from the open door, caught her eye—and instantly her face changed. “Oh, Mother!” Lois said, and burst

out crying. Ellen Clark, wheeling, clutched at her shoulder; she said just one fierce word:

*"Which?"*

Lois cringing under the gripping fingers, shook her head. "I don't know—"

Ellen, the green shawl slipping from her shoulders and dragging on the floor, ran to the paper. . . . Miss Minns crept out from her room, and she and Lois stood one on either side of her. They both cried. But the twins' mother did not cry. She put her finger on the top of the first list. Down. Down. "It's near the bottom," Miss Minns whispered—and Ellen Clark's finger paused. Her face was gray. She said nothing. She just kept her finger under the name.

"Perhaps it's a mistake," said Miss Minns.

"Oh, Mother, I'm *sure* it's a mistake!" Lois sobbed. "Don't you remember about that boy in Mercer? His name was printed, and he was entirely alive all the time!"

Silence—and the pointing finger.

"Come in back and sit down," Miss Minns entreated.

Lois lifted the hand away from the paper and kissed it. Then they led her through the narrow doorway, into the room behind the pigeonholes. She stood motionless, holding her tumbler of jelly, until, somehow, they made her sit down in a wooden rocking chair with roses painted on its headrest.

Unsorted letters were heaped on a table beside her, and a lean, battered mail bag lay on the floor. She looked at the bag with speculative eyes; perhaps there were letters in it from the twins. She said nothing. Lois knelt crying beside her; Miss Minns ran out to her kitchen and brought back in kind, shaking hands, a cup of tea. Ellen shook her head, but Miss Minns pressed it on her. "You must!"

She said, "No." Then she said, "The jelly. It will be stiffer to-morrow." She put the tumbler down on the letters on the table, saw that it tilted, and righted it.

"Do drink some tea, Mother," Lois begged.

Ellen Clark looked at her and seemed to consider. Then she said, "Don't return the tumbler, Miss Minns."

The post-office door opened and two people came in, laughing. Miss Minns, hurriedly shuffling over the mail on the table, found some letters and took them out, motioning silently toward that terrible sheet. A moment later there was an exclamation, "Does *she* know?"

"She's in back," Miss Minns whispered. "Will you go ask Dr. Lavendar to come? I'm frightened of her—"

He came. He sat down beside her and patted her hand. By and by he said, "We'll go home now, Ellen."

"It isn't as dark as I like it," she said.

The postmistress looked at Lois. "What isn't?"

"It ought to be red," Ellen Clark said. Suddenly, she screamed: "*Red! Red!*" Then she was silent.

"She means the jelly," her daughter whispered, shuddering; and murmured some tender, sobbing words. She didn't seem to hear. She didn't speak as she walked up the road to her own house, and Dr. Lavendar, walking beside her, said nothing. After all, there was nothing to say. There never is. But when they reached her door, they heard a mutter:

"I went out to the grove for him. He was dancing." Her eyes were blank and tearless.

Dr. Lavendar said, "He was glad to go, Ellen."

Again she didn't seem to hear; she was entirely apathetic. They went into the house; in the parlor, under the lamp on the rosewood table, the big family Bible lay on a wool mat. On a garlanded page, between the Apocrypha and the New Testament, was the date of his birth in gay ink. It occurred to her that some day she would look at that page—it was so pretty!—bordered with blue and pink and yellow flowers, and with mother-birds feeding open-mouthed nestlings. As she sat down, the prisms of the lamp tinkled faintly against one another, and, looking at them, she said, "Emma forgot to dust the shade."

Dr. Lavendar talked quietly to Lois, who kept tight hold of her mother's listless hand, pressing it against her own wet cheek, kissing it, pitying it;



but when he rose to go, Ellen lifted her head, then suddenly blinked, drawing in her chin and narrowing her eyes as if trying to see him. "Oh—are you here?" she said. "When did you come? Do you know—? Have you heard—?"

"Yes, Ellen."

"Dr. Lavendar."

"Yes, my friend?"

*"I thank God I have still a son to give my country."*

Harry was dead.

## Chapter Eight

OF COURSE, in those first days, Harry's mother forgot Lois and her "foolishness"! When she did think of her, she couldn't bear to see her. "She likes Arthur Kay," Ellen Clark told herself, staring at a daguerreotype of Harry in plaid skirts and ruffled shirt and round, shiny cap, and with a wooden gun in his hand. "She *likes* Arthur Kay!—and her brother was killed. If Arthur had enlisted, Harry might not have been killed." This irrationality didn't last, of course, but it left something behind it—hatred of Arthur, and—for a few days—a little shrinking from her daughter. She only betrayed it once, when, silently, she handed her a letter of condolence from Major Kay. When Lois read Arthur's father's shamed words, "Madam, I envy you a *dead* son," she cried out, passionately, "Oh, how can he be so wicked!"

After that Lois ceased to be a child; not only because of grief for her brother and distracted tenderness for her mother, but because Ellen's feeling about Arthur opened to her innocent eyes possibilities of human bitterness that frightened her. It was those possibilities which made her love for

Arthur revert to that fiercely protective fondness of her childhood—more like maternal love than sweetheart love. She not only would have died rather than let anyone know that he had been “afraid” to thrash Bobby Buttrick, but she suffered with his suffering in being afraid. In that first week after the news of Harry’s death she grew markedly older. And on Saturday she watched and watched and watched for the stage—because, for more than a week, Mrs. Kay had said nothing to Betsey, who had said nothing to Emma, who had nothing to whisper in the back entry—“so perhaps,” Lois thought, “he’s coming!” She ached with longing for him. If she could just feel his arms around her, she would be comforted about Harry! Then she remembered that she had said that Harry would thrash Bobby. “Oh, darling Harry!” she said; and suddenly, thrashing Bobby seemed of no consequence. Compared with Harry’s death, and her mother’s agony, and her own sorrow, what did Bobby’s vulgarity amount to? Compared with the greatness of Arthur’s love, the littleness of her own desire for revenge made her ashamed. This first sense of *relativeness* in the importance of human emotions gave her a vague relief about Arthur’s “timidity”; for, after all, what did that matter, either? “He doesn’t like to fight because he’s—sort of afraid; and besides, he thinks war is wrong; but he loves me—so what difference does it make?

It was foolish of me to be so mad at Bobby. He *is* horrid—but when Harry is dead, what do I care!”

If Arthur had come home that Saturday, she would have told him these things—told him how she felt about Bobby, and shown him in her child heart a thing hidden sometimes from the wise, but revealed unto the foolish—that, compared with Love, revenge is as trivial as a mote in the sunshine. If he had only come home! Then they would have talked it all out in the darkness of the carriage-house—the November nights would have been too cold for the plum tree. And if they had talked it out, each might have really known the other, and many things would have been different in their lives. But he did not come. Emma said that Betsey had heard Mrs. Kay say that Mr. Arthur was “way out West, and wouldn’t be home till after Thanksgiving.” (Oh, how could Harry’s mother and sister give thanks, that year?)

But before Thanksgiving came, Lois had left Old Chester.

It was Harry’s death that brought it about. Mrs. Clark decided within a week of that bright afternoon in the post office to go to Washington to help in the hospitals. . . . It was on Sunday; she had shut Lois out of the parlor, so that, alone, she might write Harry’s name in the family Bible, under his father’s. (Oh, black ink this time, black ink!) Even Lois should not see her write it, and then lay

her haggard face on the mourning-bordered page and kiss the words, "*died for his country.*" As she kissed them, her eyes bright and tearless, she thought of other boys, wounded as Harry had been wounded, but not dying as he had died, and said to herself, suddenly, "Why shouldn't I go and take care of them?" Instantly something like joy brought the blessed tears—until that moment her heart had been like dust. Yes! There was still something left for her to do: "I will go and help in the hospitals!"

She went. And Arthur and Lois didn't see each other for four years. . . .

Her task of grief and pity held Ellen Clark until the war was over; and of course Lois was with her—at least she was with her when she was not at boarding school. In November her mother took her to the Priory; then Ellen herself settled down in Washington. She couldn't watch Lois now; she was too broken; and, besides, her love for her girl—which, in her first bitterness at Arthur, was like a choked spring—had gushed clear again, and though, in the sunless depths of sorrow, it ran silently, it bore away all distrust of the child. If she thought of the "foolishness" at all, it was only to feel pretty sure that Lois had got over it; certainly she hadn't referred to it since the news came about Harry—except for that cruel moment when she read George Kay's letter. As far as Arthur was concerned, Ellen Clark, giving what aid she could in the hos-

pitals, forgot his existence. Lois, at the Priory drudging at her algebra and French verbs, did not forget. But in those next years, when Arthur happened to be in Old Chester (which was not often), there was no one to sit with him under the plum tree or hide in the gloom of the carriage-house. And when, on Lois' occasional days at home in the summer vacations, the afternoon stage came in, it never brought a big, handsome young man to the Kay door. It was a curious fate that they were never in Old Chester at the same time, but it explains why they didn't see each other for all those years. And—this could hardly have happened anywhere else but in Old Chester!—they didn't write to each other. Mrs. Clark was justified in relying on Lois' promise; though she had thought (while the "foolishness" was still in her mind) that it was just as well the supervision at the Priory of the young ladies' correspondence was so excellent. As far as Lois was concerned, the supervision was not laborious; except for letters to her mother and Tom, she wrote only to a few girls—and Emma. Emma stayed on in Old Chester to take care of the house, and when, at long intervals, Mrs. Clark went home for a week or two, she said it was such a comfort to have a reliable woman to look after things while she was away! She said she knew that the parlor was dusted just as faithfully when she wasn't at home as when she was. "I am afraid she reads too many silly love

stories," Mrs. Clark said. But she certainly was a great comfort, in those days when servants were getting so out of hand that sometimes Ellen Clark didn't really know what the world was coming to! "They would like to wear clothes exactly like ladies'," Mrs. Clark said. "Why, Mrs. Kay's *darkies*, Betsey and Jane, have hoop skirts, if you please! as good as mine. But Emma is so trustworthy and respectable. Not like the riffraff one sees about. I have a real affection for her. And so has Lois."

If Lois had an affection for Emma, Emma had for her, and proved it by writing to her—laborious scrawls, full of spelling almost as remarkable as Betsey's. But what is spelling between respectable servant girls and affectionate young ladies? Who cares for spelling when misspelled words run thus: "Dear lovey he cum home last Sat he cum to the kitchen door I giv him the letter you rote me he kep it." Or perhaps Emma was more general in her information: "Rover died last week she buryd him like he was a Christian in a box he wasn't here." Or: "The crazy woman hollered something horid last Sabbath Mrs. K was singin' Lord love you to her all day she set up on the loft all nite and he set there to." Sometimes Emma's letter only said, "He ain't been home fer two months"—or six, or eight. But such was Lois' "affection" for Emma that those pale scrawls were put into the silk bag,



too! When there got to be too many of them, the least precious—for of course there were degrees of preciousness in Emma's letters—were hidden in the lining of Lois' trunk. This because, when you are excellently supervised, you don't leave letters in bureau drawers or little folding mahogany desks.

The letters that Emma received from Lois had not much news in them. You could hardly expect Emma—or *anybody else*—to be interested in hearing that Lois loathed algebra, or that the principal was reading aloud to the girls Bishop Cummings on the Revelation, proving beyond the shadow of a doubt that the world was to come to an end in 1873. No; the letters to Emma were brief, confined to the hope that Emma was well, and Lois' wish that she could have some of her cakes. They always ended with the same statement: "I won't break my promise to Mother, *or anybody*. So I am engaged forever." And always at the bottom of the page, under the initials, A. K., was a little crinkly circle:



Brief as the letters were, and appropriate to a trustworthy, respectable Emma, Arthur, waiting for them in the dark at the Clarks' back door, "kep them." Not in a silk bag on his breast; an old boot on the back of the top shelf of Arthur's closet

was a perfectly safe place for letters addressed to Emma. "I bet Jane won't get up *there* to clean!" he told himself. Nor did he take the letters out of the boot and kiss them when he said his prayers. Arthur Kay didn't pray much in those days. He was still a True Follower, and "pledged to peace"; but as to the Divine Love on which the Pledge was based, he thought very little about it. Love—except Lois' love and, of course, his mother's, which he rarely thought of—had pretty much ceased to exist for Arthur. Nobody showed *him* any love! Mr. Watson was not unfriendly—because, Arthur told himself, cynically, "he couldn't get anybody to take my place!" But he believed that everybody else thought of him with contempt or hatred or suspicion—or all three. In spite of his mother's stoic precepts, his consciousness of what people thought was at this time acute. Every glance in his direction—and of course, in war-time, there are bound to be occasional glances at a big fellow in stay-at-home clothes—every look in his direction meant anger and dislike. At least he so construed them. "They think I'm a coward *and* a liar; pretty soon they'll say I'm a traitor. Well, then, Christianity is treason!" Then came his father's phrase: "I don't give a twopenny damn for the whole caboodle of 'em!" But through it all, Lois' belief in him became something to worship. She knew him, he thought, as he knew himself. His hurt and

angry heart fed on her letters to Emma—letters which no one (Lois told herself) could possibly say were breaking her word to her mother! (“Poor darling mother!—but I *mustn’t* fail Arthur.”) Even when Emma’s answers contained anything as thrilling as, “He says he’s ingaged forever I did not ask him hoo to,” even then Lois, by some queer little reasoning of her own, did not, for a year or two, feel that her promise not to “read letters from Arthur Kay” was strained. Of course, as she grew older, the sense of being clandestine became an uneasiness, and if at that time Ellen Clark or the preceptress at the Priory had read the correspondence with Emma, they would not have discovered any crinkly circle about a certain lovely word.

The war years passed. And they never saw each other or wrote to each other. Consequently their real knowledge of each other remained exactly where it was when they had parted in the dark at the woodbine trellis. The eighteen-year-old Arthur whom Lois knew then, suffering and afraid, was to her faithful heart still suffering and still afraid. The Lois Arthur had kissed then, who believed in him though everybody else misjudged him, was the same understanding Lois, though the sad years made her twenty, instead of “seventeen in February.” All they knew of each other came from glimpses not of character, but of happenings, expressed in the limited vocabulary of the dear, sentimental old

woman who played the occasional Cupid. To Emma, conscientiously dusting the Clark parlor, Arthur and Lois—though their way of corresponding was worthy of the *Ledger*—were still children; she didn't see their mental and spiritual growth, and if she had it would not have occurred to her to increase the burden of letter writing by mentioning it. Of course they had no information from anybody else. Old Chester would not have dreamed of speaking of that disgraceful young man to a loyal girl like Lois! Besides, it was not often reminded of Arthur's existence. When at long intervals he came home for a Sunday, he spent the day in the woods, rebuilding his cabin. He knew his mother didn't need him now to relieve her with the sluggish, enormously fat creature in the loft, and he had grown so silent that he didn't care to talk much, even to her. He preferred his hut, and the hill top, and his worshipping thoughts of Lois. "Of course, Mrs. Clark will object to her marrying me," he told himself, despondently; then reflected—as do many young men in love—"How can a sensible girl like Lois have such a foolish mother! . . . Well, we'll just have to wait till she learns to see straight. I'll love Lois till I die—because she trusts me."

He had discovered, with astonishment, that his own mother, too, didn't see straight. He began to tell her one day of his engagement, but didn't get further than, "I am awfully fond of Lois Clark—"

"She's a good girl," Agnes Kay said, "but very uninteresting, because unintelligent. I doubt if she can reason. I have always been surprised that you liked to talk to her." Naturally, Arthur had nothing more to say! As for his mother, his words disturbed her. Could Arthur possibly be "attracted" by Lois? After all, young men are often foolish. "If a girl is pretty, that's all some of them think of—and poor Lois *is* pretty; and a good child, even if she has no brains. But surely Arthur has too much sense—?" Yet she was uneasy, and was glad that the chance of the young people meeting was remote. Arthur was constantly traveling for Watson Brothers, and Lois was almost never at home. When either one of them did happen to be in Old Chester, Mrs. Kay kept an anxious eye on the arriving stage, lest it might bring the other. It never did, but her fear that it would, reconciled her to Arthur's prolonged absences. She missed her son, in her silent way, although now that Mary was so dulled, she didn't often need him. She was very solitary. The handful of elderly folk of her church saw her once in a while; and William King, when she called him in to see Mary, tried to talk to her in a neighborly way; but she scarcely replied to him. Dr. Lavendar would have been friendly if he had had the chance, but she often passed him in the street without even a nod, because she was too abstracted to see him. She rarely left her own house.

She sat day after day with Mary, not always because it was necessary, but just from habit—and because she didn't seem to belong anywhere else. Downstairs, the Major's rooms were shut up, and her own long parlor on the north side of the house, chilly even in midsummer, was dark now behind closed shutters. Only the dining-room, with its one place at table, seemed habitable—and even it was rarely used; Jane generally brought a tray to the foot of the attic stairs, and called; then Mrs. Kay would come down the twisting steps, take it, and carry it up to eat her spare meal outside Mary's door. She knew very little of what was going on in Old Chester—or in the world, either. She didn't read the newspapers; she just read her Bible; and she prayed much for George's soul. But sometimes she forgot his soul, and said: "Oh, take care of him—take care of him! Don't let anything happen to him!" Sometimes she wondered why—having no respect for him—her love for him had grown in these gray years of protecting him from the consequences of his evil-doing. It was unreasonable, she thought, faintly puzzled at herself. Here her rationalizing mind for once betrayed her, for she forgot that the result of returning good for evil, of giving patience where we cannot give respect, is as inevitable as the multiplication table—of course she loved him more! But she gave no sign of it; she could not possibly have broken the reticence of these twenty



years of endurance. She just brooded over him, and loathed his sins, and prayed for him—and went on putting Shem, Ham, and Japheth, and the livid green trees, out on the floor to amuse Mary. Sometimes she talked to her—she had to speak to some one!—though there was never any intelligent response. Her gentleness to Mary, like her love for George, had nothing to do with intelligence, yet it too had grown with the years. It would seem as if somehow Mary had kept her human; Mary had warmed the heart George Kay had frozen. As there cannot be love without the desire to serve, perhaps service, no matter if it is at first entirely repulsive, may be the seed of love. At any rate, George Kay's wife served Mary with the compassion which lies in the heart of Love. The woman was growing quieter and quieter. "She'll sleep away," William King said. At times she still cried for flowers—"Bouquet! bouquet!"—and when that happened Agnes Kay sang, over and over:

"Lord Lovel stood at his castle gate—"

How much did she feel the national sadness and alarm? No one knew. Some said she didn't feel it at all! They said she was not only a traitor, but a hypocrite. Her gentle words to Ellen Clark when Harry died were received with a stony dignity: "I thank you. It is a satisfaction to me to know that my son did his duty." When, as time went



on and there were other aching hearts in Old Chester, she tried to show her sympathy, no one cared for it, because everyone knew that, in her own mind, instead of calling the deaths of sons and husbands glorious, she called them unnecessary. Naturally the bereaved, sustaining themselves on great words, did not care to take pity which was, at bottom, nothing but a regret for the foolishness of dying. Of course, once in a while, some kindly soul—for there were kindly souls in Old Chester—tried to reason with her, quite fruitlessly: "What would happen if every private citizen claimed to take instruction from God instead of the state? Pretty soon there'd be no state!"

"But there would be God," she said; and conversation flagged.

"She's a dreadful bore," said Old Chester, as good-naturedly as it could, overlooking the fact that it is a sign of a limited mind to find people bores. The general feeling about her, among the kind and the unkind, was that she neither knew nor cared how things were going for the Union. And certainly those were days when things were not going well. The Confederate government was announcing gloriously (or impudently?—you can put it either way) that Jefferson Davis would soon "dictate terms of peace in Philadelphia," and the Peace Party in the North was encouraging this wrecking hope. Furthermore, the Northern army,

shrinking by the expiration of the term of volunteer service, might have to be reinforced by compulsory service—which would mean a draft!

George Kay, reflecting upon this possibility, said to himself that if the draft came, he hoped to God it would take Arthur. "He'd have to serve—or be shot. I'd say 'Fire!' to the squad myself," he said; and added his old bitter comment: "She's poisoned him. They are both Copperheads." When he thought of his wife or son—which he rarely did—he felt seriously compromised by being connected with such persons. "Copperhead" was the new word of hatred in the North, and once Kay had the humiliation of hearing it attached to his own name. . . .

It was when he was at home for the first time on a furlough (this was before the second draft), that coming down the snowy street one day, with that fine martial tread of his, he happened to see two little ragamuffins playing "Hang Jeff Davis on a sour apple tree." He stood still in the pale winter sunshine for an amused moment and watched them. An old broom, representing the arch enemy, was looped about with some little girl's skipping rope, and slung up over the leafless branches of the "sour apple tree." After which, appropriate obscenities were offered, followed by a volley of icy snowballs. Kay, chuckling, flung them a handful of fippeny bits. At that moment the youngsters, burrowing for the

coins in the snow, caught sight of Mrs. Kay coming down the street and, unmindful of the relationship of their benefactor to the outcast, began to sing (hoping, no doubt, for benefits to come!):

“Kay—Kay,  
Get away!  
Copperhead!  
Go to bed!  
Get dead!”

The immediate catastrophe of boxed ears and a few well-placed kicks sent them, bawling and bewildered, to their respective homes. Kay went up to his wife, offered her his arm, saying under his breath as she shook her head: “Take it, madam! You will walk down the street with me, and Old Chester can go to the devil.” She took his arm, and they walked together—Kay very handsome, in a new uniform, Agnes Kay thin, wan, in ridiculous skirts. They neither of them spoke. At their own great iron gates in full sight of two or three passers-by (who might be trusted to repeat what they saw!), Major Kay, standing aside for his wife to enter, made a profound bow—to the Democrat, to the Copperhead, to the coward who had “poisoned” his son; to, in fact, his own wife—then turned and would have gone on down the street, but her brief acknowledgment of his protection, “I thank you, George, but that was quite unneces-

sary," annoyed him so sharply that he followed her into the house.

"Not entirely unnecessary," he said—they were standing in the wide hall at the foot of the stairs; "I am an officer in the Union army, and no gutter-brats in Old Chester shall call my wife a traitor . . . *even if she is.*"

"I would be a traitor if I upheld my country in wrong-doing."

"I," he said, satirically, "am modest enough to refrain from deciding what is 'right' or 'wrong' for my country! All *I* do is to offer her my blood."

"Your reason would be a nobler gift," she said.

His face crimsoned under the lash of that: "Far be it from a poor sinner like me to criticize; but may I remind you that moral vanity is the snare of good people? You, no doubt, will escape it, but your son has fallen into it, with his hifalutin cocksureness! Or is he just a coward? I'd rather have him that than a traitor; certainly he hasn't got the loyalty of even those brats. . . . Where is he?"

"He is traveling for the Watsons."

"So he keeps a whole skin?"

She was silent.

"I wish he was dead—fighting for his country!" he said, but paused because, with a grave bow, she passed him and quietly went upstairs. He probably never disliked her more than at that moment—yet somehow he could not help feeling a sort of re-

spect for her. . . . He went into his library and took a drink, to prop up his respect for himself. As usual, she made him feel like a fool! He didn't know why, because he really wasn't a fool and he knew he wasn't! But he knew why he disliked her; he had more reasons for disliking her than he had fingers on his two hands! She was so lacking in female refinement that she had revealed her knowledge of an incident in his life to which no lady should refer. She wouldn't eat his bread, because it was paid for by his lottery (which had given many a poor man a lift!). She had reproved him when, like every gentleman in the country, he drank a little too much. She had made his son—his only son!—a milksop and a coward. And worst of all, was the unspeakable humiliation of her undutiful behavior as a wife. He took another two fingers of whisky. Yes, he disliked her! And who can blame him? People who run on ahead of progress are generally just as much disliked as those who run backward, against it—though the latter are called criminals and are occasionally hanged; and the others are named reformers—some of them have been hanged, too. One was crucified. But why, in spite of the reasonableness of his dislike, did he have this exasperating sort of respect for her? It was that which made him feel like a fool whenever he got into a controversy with her! That he respected her for the same reasons that he disliked her

did not occur to him. He only knew that, as usual, when he defeated her, she conquered him. Of course he didn't put it that way; instead, he fell to thinking about Arthur. He hadn't seen him since the day he had led his company out of Old Chester. But it was like George Kay, that after his bitter wish for his son's death, he should make another effort to give the boy the chance to live—before he died! "He's only been half alive, ever since he was born," he said to himself.

So, when his furlough came to an end, the day he started back to his regiment the Major stopped for an hour in Mercer, and found his way through dirty streets banked with soot-speckled snow to Watson Brothers. Great cakes of ice were stranded on the levee, and beyond them the river ran leaden under the somber sky. A dray, piled with casks, stood at the yawning entrance of the warehouse; two elderly negroes, ashen with cold, were unloading it, and Watson, a shivering, white-haired old man with a frosty red nose, was giving orders. A boy in a shabby uniform, on crutches, with a bitter face, was checking and marking. Kay, about to enter, paused and put a friendly hand on the lad's thin shoulder. "Son, those crutches make me proud of you!" he said. Then he slipped a bill into the boy's hand and went into the warehouse, his very skin prickling with shame at the thought of his own son, young, vigorous, able-bodied, sitting somewhere

in this building, *at a desk!* He wasn't even braving the raw cold of the street. The Major walked up a dirty flight of stairs, the treads rutting and splintering and the hand-rail broken, threaded his way among the casks of one storeroom after another until, through a vista of black and sticky hogs-heads, he saw at the end of the loft Arthur, bending over a desk in the little glassed-in office. Kay paused in the dusk of the towering casks and looked at the boy, who, engrossed in his work, did not see him; but the Major could note the hardness of the handsome young face. "He doesn't *look* like a coward," he thought. He struck his fist on the frame of the glass door, and it swung open with a bang. Arthur, starting at the noise, lifted his head. Father and son looked at each other. Then Arthur, standing, said, "Good morning, sir." He wore what was called in those days a "duster"—a pallid, sleazy linen coat; he had a pen behind one ear, and there was a smudge of ink on his face. He was (to his father) the typical clerk.

"I was wrong," Kay thought; "he *does* look it. And she's done it! . . . Well, Arthur," he said, "you're nice and warm in here. Some Old Chester boys are sleeping out in the snow." Arthur glanced at the little melon-shaped iron stove, but said nothing. "The Union seems in a fair way to go to the devil," the Major said; "I thought I'd just drop in and mention it to you—not that you'll think



it's a matter of much importance, compared with your pay every Saturday night."

Arthur made no reply; a crane working on the roof creaked; there was a rattle of the fall and tackle, then three casks went swaying up past the window. From below, down in the street, came Mr. Watson's squeaky old voice admonishing the ancient darkies: "Care, there, you niggers! Don't let that strap slip!"

"I suppose," the Major said, "that you are getting quite a balance in the bank?"

Arthur whitened; he took the pen from behind his ear and carefully tried the nib on his thumb nail. He seemed absorbed in that pen. Then, his lips tightening, his eyes narrowing, he looked up at his father—and his father looked at him. Big men they were, both of them, with sensitive, angry faces. It was Kay who spoke:

"There's a boy on crutches downstairs, and half a dozen black and white Methuselahs hanging around; and you—you! up here! My God! Arthur, what the devil is the matter with you, that you won't enlist? What difference does it make if you *are* killed?" (Arthur laughed.) "You've got to die sometime, haven't you? Why not take chances? If you're shot, at least you'll die with your boots on—not tucked up in bed with females sniffing over you!"

Arthur slowly stuck his pen into a little white china cup of shot.

"No, I *can't* understand it," Kay said; he looked honestly bewildered. "How can you face those old men downstairs? And that lame boy? I'd shoot myself before I'd sit up here, and—and get ink on my face! But *that*," Kay said, pointing to the bowl of shot, "is apparently all you care to see of the implements of war! Well—if you don't like bigger bullets, perhaps, if it could be arranged, you'd be willing, as a great favor to your country, to do some safe civilian work for the Union? Nothing in the least dangerous, of course, and probably it wouldn't pay as well as—"

Arthur leaped at him. "*Not again!*"

Kay, staggering backward under the blow of the clenched fist, caught at the desk to keep from falling. "Don't try that again!" Arthur shouted. "You fooled me once, damn you—" His father, recovering his balance and putting an astounded hand under his ear, could not speak for amazement. "Don't you *dare* to talk that way again! The trouble with you"—Arthur pounded his desk—"is that you don't reason any more than a—a—" he caught back the word "hen"; "and that's why you don't know that if I was a coward, I'd fight." His father gaped. Arthur, furiously red, stood glaring at him. "I don't think," he said, panting, "it's necessary to say anything more."

George Kay yelled with laughter. "No I don't think it is! You've made yourself quite sufficiently clear. Arthur, I believe you *have* a gizzard! Sit down. I want to talk to you." He sat down himself, but Arthur in his flapping duster still stood by his high desk, his hands clenched, his teeth set. "Now listen," said his father; "I may be able to get you an army job—of a kind. Not in the ranks—but better than *this*," he pointed at Mr. Watson's ledgers. "They're hiring men at Nashville, for all sorts of civilian work—"

"That's what you said before!"

"Well—it's been put through, now; and—"

"I won't fight!"

"Hold your horses. Have I said anything about fighting? You'll be a 'mohair.'" In all Arthur's life, George Kay's face had never been so happy as now; his son had struck him! His son had sworn at him! His son was a man! The tears stood in his eyes. "The Holy Ghost!" he said to himself. Even as he had seen God in blue morning glories, he saw Him, now, in his boy's passion and pain. "This is the way it stands," he said; "things are going badly. Don't repeat that! There will be another draft. You are as likely to be caught as anybody else. Then, your kind of talk might—have uncomfortable results, which, considering that you bear my name, would be embarrassing for me. If you're on some civilian job for the Government, I

*think* you'd evade the draft"—he squirmed at that sneaky word; "and you'd be serving your country,—after a fashion. I don't know what you'd have to do. Dig drains, maybe. Or keep books; you've had practice in that! But you would be safe."

Again he couldn't resist that word, which may be a man's perdition!—but Arthur was too excited to notice it. "Does he mean it?" he was thinking.

"I reckon I can manage it," his father said, as if he had heard the unspoken suspicion.

"When shall I go?" Arthur said, shortly. He displayed no gratitude; his anger at his father and his contempt for him, left no room for gratitude. "Can I go back to Old Chester to tell Mother?—or shall I just telegraph her I've gone? Of course I want her to know that it isn't fighting. I'll never fight."

"I reckon she knows it," Kay said, dryly; "you're run in her mold, Arthur." Then he gave his son one or two orders; Arthur was to do this or that; he was to report here or there;—he paused, went to the high desk and wrote half a dozen lines; Arthur was to present that to So-and-so. "And you had better only tell Watson that you are—ah—enlisting. Don't say you're a 'scorpion'; it's nobody's business, and I'd hate to have it known. And besides, I'll bet my bottom dollar that you'll drop mohair buttons after a while! Once you see the outside of the fight, you'll jump into the middle of it, body, soul,

and breeches! And there'll be no more Christianity twaddle." He was talking to his son, man to man. He was so deeply moved that he swallowed once to keep his voice steady.

Arthur, listening, assented: "Yes, sir"; "No, sir"; "I will, sir." Then, abruptly, his shame at what he had done broke out:

"I feel that I ought to—apologize, sir. I—I am sorry I . . . struck you."

George Kay threw up despairing hands. "Sorry? Good Lord! . . . Arthur, I reckon it will have to be tatting and canary birds for you, after all." The tremor of emotion was gone. "She's got him!" he thought.

So it was that Arthur Kay went into the army. But he did not jump into the fight. Nor did he take care of canary birds. He merely did, his father reflected, what any doddering old man could attend to. "But he'll be with men, and if there *is* a gizzard in him and he just keeps religion in its place, he'll catch on fire before he knows it." Of Arthur's moral gizzard he had, of course, no more comprehension than his wife had of the primal unreasoning urge to conflict, without which Arthur would not have been worth his shoe leather.

When Agnes Kay heard what her True Follower son had done—Arthur wrote to her; there was no time to go to Old Chester—she, too, thought he might catch on fire! "He will be swept into it!"

she thought, in terror. She wrote to him with, for her, emotion. "Have you considered that, even though you refrain from murder yourself, you will be helping others to do wrong?"

His reply was as concise as her appeal. "I can't deny that; but I don't care. Men have to be fed, whether they are soldiers or not. If they commit murder, that's their business." Thus was her own precept as to Tommy Clark's impudence returned to her! After writing this letter, Arthur, in spite of the haste of departure, had time for another:

Dear Emma: Tell her I'm going. It's civilian work. It won't be fighting. Tell her I will never kill anybody, and for her not to worry. She'll understand.

So it was that Arthur Kay escaped from Reason. He was still "safe," Old Chester said. And Bobby Buttrick with his weak stomach and his golden side-whiskers was drafted, and his mother couldn't beg, borrow, or steal enough money to pay a substitute to go out and get killed in his place!

Mrs. Buttrick wailed of the wickedness of the War Office, which drafted delicate young men, who couldn't eat anything but graham bread, very carefully toasted, while Arthur Kay—"great, strong, lazy Copperhead!"—was saving his skin by doing civilian work! "It's murder to take my poor Bobby," said the weeping mother. And Emma, when she wrote her faithful scrawl to Lois, said very

much the same thing: "he ain't goin' to fite lovey, so he won't git hurt so he says for you not to worry Bobby he'll fite his ma says with them Whiskers he'd ought to be a ginerall."

When Lois read this letter, she made up her mind: "He's with the army! I'll tell Mother I mean to write to him." To write to Emma at such a moment was childish. "And I'm nineteen now," she encouraged herself. So one day, with a nervous break in her voice, she said, "Arthur has gone to Nashville, and I want to write to him."

Mrs. Clark said: "Of course all that foolishness of three years ago is over; but I don't see how you can be willing, even now, to notice his existence! No patriotic girl would write to Arthur Kay, or acknowledge him as an acquaintance!"

"I acknowledge him," Lois said, "as—as a sweetheart."

Her mother looked at her in amazement; "Do you mean to say that you *still*—? Lois! I can't believe it! Your brother died for his country, and you would look at a man who let Harry go to his death and keeps out of danger himself?"

"I love him," Lois said, very low.

"Lois, you make me ashamed. A child of mine, care for a coward? Well! Be that as it may; I will not permit you to write to him."

To which Lois answered, "I am engaged to him."

Ellen Clark's face trembled with restrained tears.



"You can't be engaged to him, or write to him, or hear from him, or see him—without my consent, which I will never give! I should be ashamed to meet Harry in Heaven if I did. And when Tom comes home and hears that you have even thought of such a thing, I dread to think of his anger! I tell you frankly, Lois, that I will move to—to California, to save you from that cowardly Copperhead!"

It was Lois who had the composure to change the subject by asking some commonplace question about the house: "Shall we have such and such a thing done? It seems hardly worth while, if we are to be in Washington this winter."

Ellen Clark, trying to keep her voice steady, said: "I think Emma can attend to it. She's so reliable."

## *Chapter Nine*

THERE were dark days above Mason and Dixon's Line in the early winter of 1864. Dark days, when women prayed very much—not only for their beloveds in blue uniforms, but for the Union. And just across the Line other women prayed, not only for their beloveds in gray uniforms, but for the Confederacy. And all the while brave men went on killing other brave men. And War went on devouring Youth—not Age, which had made War! And pretty Northern girls continued to pack barrels with necessities and luxuries, and sent them off (some of the Old Chester barrels went to Arthur), to be distributed to “our soldiers”; and pretty Southern girls—the Ralph Clark girls in South Carolina—packed barrels (but only with necessities; the South had no luxuries), and sent them off to “our soldiers.” And many of the girls—just as many on one side as on the other!—wore those black dresses which Ellen Clark had foreseen that May day when, under the chestnut trees by the river, the tune was called for another sort of dance than the Lancers. Also, North and South, children—needle pickets, some people called them—scraped

bits of linen into fluff; even baby fingers pulled soft threads from old tablecloths and napkins, piles and piles of fluff and soft threads! Lint for dreadful wounds that Northern fathers inflicted upon Southern fathers; and Southern fathers upon Northern fathers. And every Sunday Southern churches prayed God to defeat the North; and Northern churches prayed God to defeat the South. And perhaps God was pitiful enough to laugh at both of them?

Agnes Kay neither laughed nor prayed for defeat. But she did pray, "Let Arthur die, rather than kill." And she prayed, "Save George's body, so that his soul may have time for repentance."

As for George Kay, he, like everybody else (except Mary), had pretty much forgotten her existence. Having dragged his son away from her poisonous influence, and having hopes that the boy, occupied with other things than canary birds and tatting, would "catch on fire," he never thought of her. Old Chester, unoffended now by the sight of Arthur—"big, hulking fellow, sneaking home to his mother when better men were dying for their country!"—was not irritated into remembering her.

She was so rarely seen on the streets that it was easy to forget her; Betsey did the meager marketing for the feminine household, and Jane went for the mail. Once in a while, if there was a Sunday when Mary was quiet, she hired a buggy and drove

to Upper Chester to the meeting-house of the True Followers; but as she started early and came home late, loyal and respectable people, who worshiped in a real church, were not apt to see her. No one, except (when summoned) William King, called upon her. So the great iron gates on the street were never opened, and by and by the latch rusted in its socket, and grass crept across the unused driveway. As none of the men left in Old Chester (all elderly, of course, or else sickly) would work for the Copperhead, dilapidation began to deface the stately house, and about the same time gossip defaced her character. Apparently nothing was too ridiculous to say about her:

“Perhaps she’s a spy?”

“Did you ever know anything like her conceit? You’d think she had God in her pocket, the way she lays down the law about right and wrong!”

“Are you sure it’s a *woman* she keeps up there in the loft?”

But except for minds of this caliber, very little thought was given to Agnes Kay. Spiritually speaking, she had been tarred and feathered and ridden on a rail out of town; so of course Old Chester forgot her,—except, oddly enough, old, cantankerous Benjamin Wright. He remembered her, and said what he thought of her with malicious glee to anyone who would listen to him; especially to Dr. Lavendar. “That woman has the impudence, Lav-

endar, to say War is wrong, when the example of the Church in sitting on both sides of the fence, indicates that War is right! But the Church always knows which side its bread's buttered. She doesn't. Its Founder didn't. But then He didn't understand business! He upset the tables of the money-changers—a thing the Church would never do. Why, it wouldn't let its founder, today, stand in one of its nice handsome pulpits; He might say something impractical. He might say, 'Love your neighbor as yourself'—which would cut down business profits dreadfully! And you wouldn't catch the Church eating with publicans and sinners, as He did;—unless they were rich.

It would be compromising—"

"I am delighted, Benjamin, to find how well you know your Bible," Dr. Lavendar interrupted; "go on reading it, and you'll discover that the Church can't be better than its members. You and I, for instance."

"Bosh! That female, Lavendar, wouldn't compromise, any more than your Founder would. And she eats with niggers. Shocking! And she's such a fool she doesn't care whether she has any butter on her bread. Her theories would upset the money-changers' whole kettle of fish. Conceit! Conceit! And she presumes to talk peace! *Peace*—to the Church!" His voice broke into a sarcastic squeak.

"Well, the Church may be smoking flax, Ben-

jamin; but if you will just go on searching the Scriptures, you won't try to quench it."

The old man laughed sardonically. "Gad-a-mercy, she makes me uncomfortable! So I don't like her. I'll tell her some day what I think of her."

He did tell her. He met her once outside her own big gates—a forlorn, dirty, tremulous old man, with mumbling jaws and a frowsy brown wig tilting over one eye; stopping right in front of her he said, in his angry voice, and pounding the earth with his stick, "Madam! I have something to say to you: I have a very poor opinion of Christianity. But, *ex ungue—leonem!* (I hear you are one of those learned females who read Latin when you should be having babies.) I will say to you, what I have never said to any parson on earth: '*Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian!*'" He looked at her with melancholy eyes; his face twitched with emotion. "God bless you," he said, and hobbled off, leaving her dumb with astonishment. His tribute (which, of course, he repeated raucously to Old Chester) did not impress anyone, because, as everybody knew, he was as queer in his way as she was in hers. So she was really forgotten.

It was after the battle of Nashville—in which Bobby Buttrick was wounded and Tom Clark was killed—that people began to remember her. It was Bobby who brought her to mind. Bobby, who had fought like a wildcat (whether from gal-

lantry or from fear is immaterial), came home from the hospital minus an arm—a martial and splendid invalid, with a perfectly good stomach and also a valiant story of how he had heard a lousy Johnny Reb—a prisoner—actually sing Bobby's own especial song! "But the damned Reb," said Bobby, "had made the *North* the *South's* spittoon! How's that for impudence? I kicked his face in," said Bobby, fiercely; "I'd 'a hung him, if I'd been our colonel!"

Old Chester was so thrilled by Bobby's empty sleeve that it forgave his brutal nastiness; to see him and his yellow whiskers, and the swinging sleeve, going about the streets, was enough to thrill anybody! Mrs. Buttrick, stuffing him with food and weeping, of course, over his poor dear arm, was the proudest woman on earth, and talked of "my Robert" and his valor until people fled when they saw her coming! Among other things she was able to tell Old Chester that Bobby knew "for a fact" a horrid thing about Arthur Kay. "Bobby happened to run across him after he left the hospital," she said. She explained that she had not mentioned this before, "out of consideration for Major Kay, who whatever his wife may be, is loyal to the flag!" Her consideration ended after Bobby had had a humiliating half hour with Lois Clark. He had proposed, and been coldly refused. Instantly, angry intuition made him think of Arthur Kay—so he



told her the "horrid thing," and she retorted that he lied! "You are never to speak to me again as long as you live!" said Lois, scarlet with anger. "I'm engaged to him, and he wouldn't wipe his shoes on you. You are a perfect reptile!"

It was shortly after that that Bobby's story spread through Old Chester. It spread, even though the Buttricks moved away—nobody cared where! "Good riddance!" said Old Chester, very tired of Bobby, and his stummick, and his patriotic vulgarity. But before they moved, Bobby said that Lois had told him (confidentially) that she was in love with Arthur Kay. "Of course, she didn't know what a crooked stick he was," Bobby said, "so I thought it was my duty to tell her." Then he did his duty—to all Old Chester! Certainly his tale indicated "crookedness." It was an astonishingly foolish lie, but it grew, of course, in size and detail on each new lip. At first it was not really believed; people, repeating it, added, good-naturedly, "Bobby has always fibbed." They would have said "lied," had it not been for that empty sleeve. Yet if one hears even a fib often enough, one says, "Well, perhaps there's something in it?" Ellen Clark, at home for a fortnight, said (in that voice, so hard and colorless since Tom's death), "So much smoke means *some* fire."

Lois said, "It's an entire lie!"

Old Emma said "Shucks!" But she mentioned

the "lie" in a letter to Arthur, which was how he first learned that Bobby Buttrick had said that he, Arthur, had turned a penny by selling to the soldiers things sent to him, personally, for free distribution. Things from one of those barrels, packed by sad women in black dresses in Old Chester! It was too long a tale for Emma to write in full, but eight words gave Arthur the gist of it. His mother could have given him the details—but she didn't. She might have said that Mrs. Buttrick said that Bobby said that he had heard the story a dozen times from other soldiers, but he didn't believe it—"couldn't believe it, even of Arthur Kay," said Mrs. Buttrick—until he himself saw Arthur give a soldier a pair of socks, and take money from him; "he saw Arthur put his hand back in his pocket!" said Mrs. Buttrick.

"At least it was appropriate for him to sell socks," somebody said, "though I hope he darned 'em first."

And somebody else said, "Well, we all know he'd do anything to make money!"

But to sell things that were to be given to the soldiers—"What contemptible theft!" said Old Chester.

"Nonsense!" said Dr. Lavendar.

"Well, I'm sure I *hope* it isn't true!" everybody said.

Why was Bobby's little lie, which was to pay Arthur back for so many things, a lost tooth, a slap

in the face from Lois Clark, and now that refusal, as definite as a slap, coupled with the information that he was a reptile—why was it more or less believed?—entirely believed by poor, desolate Ellen Clark! Of course, in war time one believes anything of the enemy—that is what war does to common sense. In fact, there couldn't be war, unless lies were believed. War has to be nourished by lies. When hideous stories were told of Confederate cruelty, the North had no doubts—and the kindness of individual Southerners was never referred to. When even more hideous stories were told of General Sherman's march through Georgia, the South had no doubts—and the occasional humanities of the invader were not reported. It is not only wheat that thrives on good ground. Tares thrive, too. As for Arthur, the mind of Old Chester had for so many years been plowed and enriched by rumors of his "eccentricities" that it was ready for the tare Bobby sowed, and the lie sprung up, and brought forth fruit fiftyfold—a hundredfold! Arthur had sold to Union soldiers—*everything* entrusted to him for distribution among them! He had sold "barrels and barrels of food and clothing"!

Arthur, writing his mother, mentioned briefly that he had heard Bobby Buttrick's pretty story. "I wonder he didn't say I sold a field mortar to the

Rebels at the same time I took money for the socks. I bet Old Chester would have believed it!"

Perhaps because in her solitude she did not realize how widespread was the belief in the pretty story, or perhaps because what people thought was, as always, "of no importance"—his mother did not, in answering his letter, do more than make the briefest reference to the Buttricks; they had left Old Chester, and had gone, she believed, out West. "I don't know where. Of course I did not deny Robert's lie, but I said that his statement that you were in love with Lois Clark was a mistake. I knew she was not the sort of girl you would care for—she never reasons."

It was characteristic of his imprisoning reticence that Arthur, replying, did not dispute that opinion of Lois; he only said that, as for being in love with her, Bobby was *not* mistaken! "I am," he said; and his mother, reading the laconic announcement, frowned with dismay. But Arthur paid no further attention to Bobby's revenge. He was too busy to think of Bobby. He was terribly absorbed by the war. His mother's fear that he would be swept into it was not justified; but his father's hope that he would catch on fire had been fulfilled; he *was* on fire! On fire with horror at what (with his mother's eyes) he saw about him: confusion, selfishness, stupidity at the top; agony, terror, bestiality at the bottom. He did not see (with his father's

eyes) things of spiritual beauty, as truly there, both at the top and at the bottom, as the abominations. But he saw (with his own eyes) a single fact, which is independent of both suffering and glory, namely, that war is as inconclusive morally as it is destructive materially. And in that year, the last year, when God was sifting out the hearts of men before His judgment seat, Arthur Kay didn't need his "pledge to peace" any more than he would have needed a pledge not to eat filth and poison served on a golden platter—that shining gold, of courage, and endurance, and sacrifice, and death! the death of the private soldier who dies with splendor, often not knowing why he dies. "I would be shot ten times over," Arthur told himself, "rather than go into this hell of hate and dirt—and gorgeous idiocy!"

It must have seemed endless, that last year. Yet it did end. And all over the North—orphaned by the death of Abraham Lincoln,—men streamed back to homes materially unchanged. All over the South—which had lost its best friend—the stream was turned toward homes so materially changed, that many of them had ceased to exist! (And the bitterness of the homeless men, looking at nothingness, was planted like a seed in the minds of their children.) Among the streaming men, settling into industrial life, came Arthur Kay, who, because of Bobby Buttrick's lie, was not to find, in his own community, any industry into

which to settle. But just at first he didn't know that, having not the slightest conception of Old Chester's feeling about him. . . . When he started home, he felt the shy, excited satisfaction common to every soldier. He even expected to be slapped on the back and listened to, if, like other men, he told some modest tales! He had thought out in his logical way how forcibly, now, he could put his reasons for echoing General Sherman's definition of war. "They'll listen, now," he thought, for he knew that Old Chester's heart had been seared by the flames! Yes, people would admit that it wasn't a chicken liver that had kept him at home.

His hope of being understood showed that the bitterness of the misunderstood years had lessened a little. His certainty that his theories were terribly right had partially wiped out the personal animosity of having heard them called wrong. War had ennobled him, to the extent that to have been misjudged seemed a small thing, compared with the awfulness of the vindicating reality. Then, too, there must have been the satisfaction of a youngster who had proved that he was not a coward—for they must have heard that he had been under fire sometimes? At any rate, people would know now why he had been willing to be kicked out of town rather than enlist! That Buttrick's lie had intensified Old Chester's desire to kick him never occurred to him. So, then, he arrived.



To his great satisfaction, he happened to come back in a stage crammed, inside and out, with members of the original Kay Company, who had been mustered out about the time his civilian work ended. It was a roaring ride down from Mercer, and though there were one or two jokes about "socks," Arthur, joyfully kicking the jokers, yelled with laughter like all the rest of them. They were expected, and the whole town had gathered to meet them. Arthur Kay's mother was waiting with the other mothers—but she stood apart, a silent, unnoticed figure in her immodest skirts. It was a midsummer afternoon, fragrant with new-mown hay, and with a scud of white clouds flying across a dazzling blue sky. Flags were whipping out from every pole in town; they flapped and billowed from windows and swayed over doorways; the columns of the tavern porch hid their scaling and blistered paint in swathes of red, white, and blue bunting. Girls who generally wore black had on white dresses—"just for this afternoon"! Some of the mothers could not quite do that, but they left their long veils at home. Before a cloud of dust showed that the stage was approaching, Uncle Davy, in an armchair on the porch, began to tune up for "See the Conquering Hero Comes"; and when at last it rumbled in, Dr. Laven-  
dar was on the steps to say "Welcome home!" and clap every man on the back—some very gently, for two boys were on crutches, and one was blind.



"Sound the trumpet! Beat the drums!" Uncle Davy squeaked, slapping time with his foot while the tears ran down his cheeks and dropped on his fiddle strings. Van Horn bumped about with his tray of glasses and bottles, and Mrs. Van Horn, scolding like a fishwife with happiness, handed around great slabs of fruit cake; then out of the stage came the handful of old young men, worn, some of them, and rather vaguely joyful and grinning, but all proud—in a cynical fashion. When Arthur clambered down over the wheel, he gave a swift glance at the crowd to see the girl who had held up her little brave hand to him on the day of his great humiliation. In his disappointment at not seeing her, he didn't notice his mother—until Dr. Lavendar pointed her out, and William King said, "Hello, Arthur! There she is, over there!" Van Horn, too, said, coldly: "Mrs. Kay's waiting for you. But have a drink first? I guess you ain't prayin' against good liquor nowadays?" The significance of his tone brought a laugh.

Arthur, grinning, made his way to his mother. But even while he said, "Hello, Mother!" and kissed her, he was looking over her head. "Are you all right?" he said. (Perhaps Lois was in that group of white bubbles on the porch?)

Mrs. Kay was trembling, but all she said was, "We will go home now, Arthur."

"Yes," he agreed—but waited; some girls were

coming up the street. She was not among them. Then he looked about for any outstretched hand; but Old Chester seemed to have forgotten him, though somebody called, "Hi, Arthur! Did you know Fatty Buttrick lost an arm?"

"So I heard," Arthur said, good-naturedly. Then, as no further attention was paid to him (and there was no sign of Lois), he turned and walked up the road with his mother. Mighty nice to have her meet him, of course; but Lois. . . . ? It must be that she was still in Washington. . . . And what was the matter with people? "You'd think I had smallpox!" he told himself. His shy exhilaration seemed to run out of his knees. Yet he never thought of Bobby. On the way home he and his mother talked very little; she could not trust her voice, and he was thinking: "Oh, I wish she'd wear hoops. . . . Emma'll tell me when Lois will be home. I'll go over and see her, right after supper!" Then he remembered to say, "How's Mary?"

"About the same." She could hardly see the path for tears of thankfulness; but she could not talk. Only the little hammering vein in her temple showed her breathless joy. He was at home—and he had not betrayed his Lord! "We must go in at the side gate," she said; "the front gates haven't been opened for so long, the latch has stuck." So they took the footpath through ragged, overgrown shrubbery to the back porch; there Arthur paused, "I'll just

step into the kitchen for a minute," he said, "and speak to Betsey and Jane." ("They'll know where Lois is!" he thought.)

She couldn't help wondering at the length of time he stayed in the kitchen; but she didn't begrudge him to the two good black women who had loved him as long as she had! And besides, it gave her a chance to look at the supper table—for that was her little celebration. She had ordered tarts—damnation tarts!—for his supper. Her eagerness to be foolish, just for joy, was pitiful, because she didn't know—poor logical saint!—how to be foolish. The extravagance of those tarts was as near as she could come to foolishness. They amazed Arthur, cheerfully gobbling them up, as they would have amazed George Kay, if he had been there—which he was not, being stationed in New Orleans. But his son did not ask about him. His feeling for the Major was still the feeling of the little boy—"I *like* father!" So it seemed a sort of disloyalty to talk of him to his mother—who didn't like him; but he did refer to Bobby's tale: "I wouldn't have thought even Fatty could be such an ass!"

"It was too vile to deny," she said.

"Of course. Certainly *I* shan't deny it! Nobody can ever catch up with a lie if it has had even twenty-four hours' start—and this has had weeks!"

"I hope you have forgiven him."

He reflected. "I have never known just what forgiveness means."

She said it meant a state of mind which could feel pleasure when something good happened to an enemy. "When we can rejoice in his joy, we know we have forgiven him," she said.

"By that token," said Arthur, chuckling, "I haven't forgiven Mr. Fatty Buttrick. If anybody left him a million dollars, I should hang myself with rage!"

If it had not been his blessed first night at home, she would have reminded him of his Master's words about forgiveness; but she was too shaken with happiness to reprove him. Instead, she said, briefly, that she hoped he had conquered his foolishness about Lois Clark.

"It isn't foolishness. I'll marry her the minute her mother will consent."

Mrs. Kay was speechless; Arthur—an intelligent man—marry a girl with no mentality whatever!

"Betsey says," Arthur went on with elaborate casualness, "that Mrs. Clark is not coming back to Old Chester until fall?" This was as near as he came to asking about Lois. That word "foolishness" shut him up; besides, Emma would tell him! They hadn't much more to say to each other. Arthur declared that Betsey was a bully cook; and Mrs. Kay mentioned that of late Mary was having more trouble with her breathing. "Dr. King says she's failing."

"Thank the Lord!" said Arthur.

His mother winced; Mary was the only person in the world who needed her. It occurred to her that she would be lonely when Mary died. "I must go up to her now," she said, rising, but paused and let her hand rest for a minute on his shoulder. Just to touch him was joy.

"Shan't I come up with you?" Arthur inquired, politely. She said, "No." Arthur did not insist—he was too eager to see Emma to hang around in the loft! Not that he thought Emma would have a letter to show him. Lovely words inclosed in crinkly circles had long ago ceased in Lois' letters to Emma; Lois, at twenty, felt that furtiveness was an indignity to Love; so Arthur did not expect anything more than news of her whereabouts. Yet, standing in the Clarks' kitchen, listening to Emma's: "I wrote to her you was comin' home from the war. Here's what she says:—" he read, by the light of the little kerosene lamp, six shining words—*Tell him I have never changed.*

"There! You can have it," Emma said, sympathetically. ("An' he tuk the letter and put it into his boozum!" she told Betsey afterward.) Emma had much to talk about. She began with Bobby:

"What was it, anyhow, that he seen you do?"

There was some anxiety in her voice. When she had first heard Buttrick's lie, she had said, like any other sensible person, "Shucks!" But now she

thought to herself, "If he don't say he's going to smack Bobby's face, I'll be—oneasy."

Instead of saying so, Arthur just laughed loudly—and Emma's oneasiness vanished! "Tell me about Lois!" he said. They were sitting at either end of the kitchen table, the lamp between them, and the New York Ledger open under Emma's hand; "when will she be home?" he demanded.

"Well, I don't just know," Emma said; "Mis' Clark don't seem to care 'bout comin' home. Her heart's broke 'bout our twins. An'—an'—" ("I was bound," she told Betsey afterward, "to warn the boy what he might expect") "she's set against anybody in pants that wasn't in the war. Tom and Harry bein' killed makes her that way," said Emma, simply.

Arthur, his elbows on the table, was not interested in Mrs. Clark: "Emma, tell Lois I'll not leave Old Chester till she gets back!" So they talked and talked—until suddenly he remembered his mother. She might think he was neglecting her! He must go. . . .

But Agnes Kay was not conscious of being neglected. Up there in the loft, she did not miss him. She didn't even want him. She wanted God!—God, who had brought him back to her. When she had made Mary ready for the night, she said, holding the big, inert hand in both of hers, "Mary, my son has come home to me!" Mary blinked.

"Oh, Mary, *don't* you understand? Just this once, don't you understand? Arthur—my little boy—has 'come back!'" Mary's eyes closed. Agnes smiled. "Never mind; go to sleep," she said, gently. Then, with a sigh of happiness, she knelt down at the iron bed outside Mary's door. . . . By the next day she was entirely composed and unemotional, and ready, if the opportunity came, to remind Arthur that, to really forgive, we must pray for them that despitefully use us. The opportunity, however, did not come. He never referred to Bobby or his story.

But Old Chester did! At first Arthur felt the talk, even though he didn't hear it. In a week he heard it. Roundabout references to "barrels from home"; then a direct insult, "Well, Kay, I understand you ran a good business selling stuff on your own hook?" He turned on his heel and went home, white and silent. The shock of discovering how foolish as well as cruel human meanness can be, hardened him exactly as, long ago, his mother had been hardened by discovering her husband's baseness. With Arthur, the hardening came more slowly: first, there was amazement at the sheer absurdity of Bobby's lie; then anger at Old Chester; then pain, which, like slowly inclosing ice, held his mind in the rigid mold of disdain. His only words to his mother on the subject were: "It appears they believe I did it. Well, they can think what they



please! It's nothing to me." That he did not instantly deny the foolish thing must have been sharply irritating to the people who didn't believe it. Several of them gave him an opportunity to deny it. Old white-haired Mr. Watson, in Mercer, was the first to do so. When Arthur presented himself at the warehouse and asked for a job, Mr. Watson said, "Kay, our bookkeeper has a bee in his bonnet that has been buzzing round the whisky glasses at the tavern in your town; even got up here to Mercer! Some hanky-panky gossip as to your selling stuff to our men which was to be given away. Go up to the office and tell him to go to hell, then you and I can talk business."

Arthur, almost too wounded to speak, said only three words—"No, thank you." "And turned tail," Mr. Watson said, "and walked off! Now, do you suppose it's true?"

Another chance to stamp the lie out was lost when the boy said, in answer to an embarrassed word from somebody else about a reference for ability, "and—*honesty?*" "Good day!"

"Donkey!" William King said, impatiently, when the possible employer told the story, adding, "If the fellow had spoken up and damned Buttrick's eyes, I'd have taken him. But it looks—queer."

William's excellent wife, Martha, thought it looked so queer that Arthur should be spoken to. Martha never shirked speaking to people who need

to be spoken to. "Arthur, Bobby Buttrick said something about you, and I think it is my duty to tell you, flatly and frankly, that it's your duty to say it's a falsehood—if you can, truthfully."

"Suppose I can't?" Arthur said, his eyes narrowing. "And he didn't say another word!" Martha gasped. "I believe he did it!"

Also, some of the True Followers felt that he should be told to deny the accusation—"in the Lord." Which meant if he "could truthfully." In the chapel, the first Sunday after his return (he was alone; his mother could not leave Mary) he felt people's eyes, as he might have felt their fingers tapping his shoulder, with the query, "*Did you do it?*" He even saw, or thought he saw, a question in the dim look of the old minister, glancing down at him from the pulpit. . . . As he went out of the meeting house door some one touched his arm: "Young brother—" Three of the elders were waiting to speak to him; weather-beaten farmers they were, guileless, stupid, narrow men with long gray beards and hard, honest faces. One of them said, "Brother, there is a grievous accusation against thee—"

Arthur, turning upon him, said, loudly, "So I hear!"

Other Followers paused, then drifted nearer and stood listening. "Thee will wish to deny it—"

"You're mistaken. I don't."

"Thee *don't?*"

"No."

The elder, lapsing, in his astonishment, into the vernacular, said, "I bet you can't!"

"Just so," the young man said, haughtily; "I can't."

Somebody—a little withered old woman, whose Shaker bonnet was tied under a mean chin, said, "There! I knew he done it!"

Arthur, looking over her head at the elder, whose beard was quivering like a startled goat's, shrugged his shoulders; his contempt was so open that the woman's face reddened as if it had been slapped.

"All you've got to do is to say you didn't!" she defended herself. "Did you?"

"If it is necessary for people to ask me that question, then, so far as they are concerned, I *did*. And be damned to them!"

"Brother! Brother!" the three elderly men said, all together.

The minister, panting down the aisle in his haste to reach the excited group at the chapel door, raised a feeble hand. "This is unseemly. Arthur, my son—"

But the boy, not waiting for the fatherly words, rushed away, hearing behind him the shocked murmur, "*Profanity!*—and on the Lord's Day!" He didn't tell his mother what had happened; he hid the bruise on his soul.

It was a week later that Dr. Lavendar came to

him, not with advice or questions, but with a command: "Arthur, there is an ugly story about you—a ridiculous story! It must be denied. Immediately! Just authorize me to do it."

"I suppose you mean that I sold things which were to be given to the soldiers?"

"Yes."

"How can I prove I didn't?"

"Don't try to. Just tell me you didn't. That's all that's necessary."

Arthur said, slowly, "That is necessary?"

"Yes," said Dr. Lavendar "it is!"

There was a pause; then Arthur said: "You're mighty kind, Dr. Lavendar. But it's no use. Everybody believes it. And I don't care. I won't deny it."

"You ought to care!" Dr. Lavendar said. "Your reputation doesn't belong only to you. It belongs to us all. Did you ever think of that? So you've no right to lose it, just for personal vanity. *Vanity*, Arthur, not pride. Don't confuse the two! Deny this preposterous lie, up and down! Swear about it, if you want to. It won't hurt my feelings."

"I haven't any reputation to lose. I guess I never had it, so I haven't missed it. No, sir, I won't deny it. I—I *can't*, Dr. Lavendar. And nobody would believe me if I did."

"They'll believe me!"

"I'm much obliged to you, sir, but I can't do it."

"I can!" Dr. Lavendar called after him. He was, Dr. Lavendar told William King, "as hard as nails! I hoped he would get swearing mad. But he didn't."

"He ought to get mad!" William said; "if he won't deny it, people are justified in believing it, especially as he has always grabbed at a dollar!"

"It provokes me that he won't," Dr. Lavendar admitted, "yet I understand it, in a way. Don't you? If anybody said that you hadn't enlisted because you were afraid, and that, staying at home, you had taken five cents out of the contribution box as you were bringing it up the aisle, would you deny either accusation?"

William winced and laughed. "No, but I'd boot the fellow that accused me!"

"Not if you were a True Follower. No, Willy; I believe the boy is right when he says he '*can't*.' Don't you see, when he was red hot with his foolish ideas about war, some of us followers of the Prince of Peace said he wouldn't enlist because he was a coward. Well, that hammered him into this devil's horseshoe of indifference to our opinion. Now the iron is cold. It will never straighten out until he gets hot again. Red hot! But I don't know what flame can reach him. Love, maybe? They say he's in love with Lois Clark. But if she refuses him, he'll be colder than ever."

"She'll certainly refuse him," William said; "she wouldn't look at him—a girl who lost two brothers

in the war! That's another thing that puts people against him now. Better men than he gave their lives."

Dr. Lavendar nodded. "Yes; we can't forgive him for not getting killed."

"As for this socks story," Willy King ruminated, "if he'd been caught murdering somebody, it could be overlooked. Most decent men want to commit murder now and then. The desire is to their credit. But to take money from a soldier boy for something that belonged to him!—Why, if he doesn't ram the lie down every damned throat (beg your pardon, sir!) that uttered it, of course people will believe it. I don't blame 'em!"

Dr. Lavendar sighed. "I've told everybody it was nonsense; and all they say is, 'Well, I *hope* you are right.' "

"I bet it's the women who say that. Pious cats!"

"One reason he won't deny it," said Dr. Lavendar, "is that his mother has trained him to endurance from the time he was born, and now he thinks endurance in itself is a virtue. She put the fox into his bosom."

"If keeping his mouth shut is 'endurance,' " William said, "it is also damn-fool conceit! But he comes by 'endurance' honestly, for certainly his mother—why, Dr. Lavendar, I never saw anything like it! That crazy woman—"

"Have you any idea who she is, William? I've

often wished Mrs. Kay had been less reticent about her."

The doctor hesitated. "Course, I don't *know*; but the poor creature has muttered things about Beau Kay that set me—well, wondering."

Dr. Lavendar gave him an astonished look. "You can't mean—?"

"Well, I don't *know*."

Dr. Lavendar was silent; then he said: "If that is so, then that loft is holy ground. But how does Kay endure it!"

"I don't believe he knows it."

"What! Not know who is living in his own house?"

Again William King hesitated; then he said: "He knows there's an insane person in the loft, of course. He has asked me occasionally how 'Mrs. Kay's friend' was getting along. Apparently he didn't know her name. I reckon nobody does—except that poor exasperating saint who takes care of her! She's just called 'Mary.' As for knowing what is going on in his own house"—William paused . . . "Dr. Lavendar, I have reason to believe that Kay hasn't been upstairs as far as—as the second floor, since Arthur was born. He sleeps in that room back of the library. George Kay may be all the things people say—a gambler, and a drunkard, and—and other things; but he is a gentleman."



The two men looked at each other. Dr. Lavendar made a gesture of respect. Then, after a minute's silence, he said, "Well, I've always expected to meet the Major in Heaven—provided I get there myself. But as for Arthur, 'endurance' is bred in his bones—from both sides!"

It was after three months of endurance—three months of pin pricks, and furtive mud throwing, and grinning hints as to the public duty of kicking him out of town; three months of occasional displeased admonition from Dr. Lavendar, and of kindly, jeering advice from old Benjamin Wright: "Don't deny. Spit!" Three months of knowing that the True Followers were praying for him—nothing is more infuriating to Youth than to know it is being prayed for!—that Arthur capitulated. Not by denial of Buttrick's story. Merely by flight. With no saving shred of trust in human kindness and common sense left, and still without a job—for of course nobody would take him without first asking for references—he acted upon his creed, "They can think what they please." Leaving the lie unrefuted, he went up into the woods, enlarged his cabin by putting a little shed behind it for his traps, and buried himself in silence. He was *done*, he told himself. He would never make any effort to find that reputation which he was perfectly right in saying he had never had. "When Lois comes home," he said to himself, "and hears what they say, I'll tell her she can throw

me over if she wants to—and I won't blame her!" This was the foolishness of anger; he knew perfectly well that Lois would not throw him over. Even without that letter to Emma with its six divine words, he would have trusted Lois. "But if it wasn't for her, I'd clear out and never come back to this damned place." In those next weeks of aching disdain and the smart of torn pride, he was upheld by his certainty of Lois. "She knows me," he told himself, "as God does." It never struck him that changes in character, inevitable in four years, might be known to God, but couldn't be known to Lois. He had the same rather pathetic delusion about his father: "He knows I'm not a skunk!" He had occasional pangs of shame because of his behavior to his father that day in the sugar warehouse. "But *he's* not like this pint-pot town; he'll never think of it again! And he'll find work for me, and then I'll have money enough to get married." Meantime, he had his small income from his grandfather's bequest, which, helped out by his gun and his traps—and Betsey—would keep him alive. Occasionally he went into Old Chester to see his mother, but he carefully did not see anybody else. When he passed people in the street, he looked through them—beyond them! As far as he was concerned, the fools didn't exist. He didn't tell his mother of these things. He was not in the habit of talking to her about himself. Their conversation had always been

calmly kind and unintimate. Now, it was hardly more than queries from her as to his comfort—didn't he need an extra blanket? Or a reminder to bring her any mending he wanted done. And he would say, "Would you like me to sit in the loft while you go out?" or, "Can I do any errands for you?" or, occasionally, some listless comment on the political reverberations of the war. He was not in the least secretive—he was merely silent. The endurance which she had so painfully developed in him was now a wall between them so she never saw him wince under the gnawings of the mangy fox of gossip!

In those days of waiting for Lois to come back, there were, of course, one or two evil moments when he said to himself, "Will *she* believe it?" When that sly black thought crept upon him, he would take the letter to Emma out of his "boozum" and read again that shining sentence: *I have never changed*. "Even if she didn't love me, she wouldn't believe it. I won't doubt her!" Once, in the dark, his eyes stung with sudden remorseful tears because, just for a minute, he did doubt her. "I am as bad as anybody in Old Chester—worse! Their distrusting me is nothing compared with my distrusting her!" And once he actually knelt down and in a smothered voice said something like, "Lois, forgive me—" It was a prayer. "The first thing I'll do when I see her," he thought, "will be to ask

her to forgive me." It was this trust in Lois' trust that kept him, in spite of his arrogance and pain, spiritually alive. But the wound, which might have been cauterized by some red-hot expression of anger, just festered; and all he did was to spread over it the acrid salve of "I don't care."

Meanwhile Lois, still literal, but not quite the Lois of kisses in the dark by the woodbine trellis—a sad Lois, for the twins were gone; a Lois hardened by the courage of love into obstinacy—Lois was counting the days until she could come home. She did not come until late in October. Her mother had kept deferring their return. Ellen Clark didn't want to come home—the house would be so empty. But she had nowhere else to go—nothing else to do. Her country had taken her at her word when she told Tom and Harry she gave them to the Union. The Union took them! And it took also her eagerness, and her gay interest in living; it took her sweet, hot color, and her loud, beautiful laugh. It left her, of course, her pride in her sons—but for the soul, pride alone is a starvation diet! Yet if she starved, she made no complaint. She just said to herself, "It won't be long." There was little comfort in the words, for she knew that for a perfectly well woman of fifty, it was bound to be long. She talked much of the twins to Lois, and her glory in the deaths that they had died; but always there was, behind her pride, contempt for Arthur Kay. Not

that she had any apprehensions now about Lois; she had practically forgotten the girl's old foolishness—"imagining she was in love with Arthur Kay—and her brothers in their graves!" She had only love for Lois—who was, she used to say, all she had left in the world. But she was very listless when she came back to the house which, for all these years, Emma—when not reading the *New York Ledger*—had so faithfully dusted. . . . And the next afternoon old Betsey trudged up to the cabin to tell him.

"Her ma's tuckered out and has took to her bed. But *she'll* go to the carriage-house to-night, 'bout eight." This because there had been a rainy week, and the plum tree was dank and dripping.

## *Chapter Ten*

IN THE tremor of that first meeting they didn't know—these two faithful children, now man and woman!—that they were strangers. To be sure, he saw that she was shy—who had had the heavenly boldness of innocence; and she saw that he was daring—who had had the timidity of the worshiper; but such sweet surface differences did not reveal deeper differences which had developed in the separating years: his ruthlessly reasoning hardness; her entirely unreasoning tenderness. To her he was what she had always thought him—true and timid. To him she was what he had always believed her—understanding and faithful.

Lois, kissing her mother good night and promising not to "sit up late," had gone stealthily through a softly falling rain, across the garden under the leafless pear trees, to the coach-house. They had made paper dolls there, on wet days, when they were children, and played Indian; how the dilapidated old carriage had rocked on its springs as they leaped in and out, hiding from Tom and Harry—or Bobby. "I wonder where he is? The liar!" Lois thought. She pushed the big sliding door side-

wise, and as it creaked on its rollers she had a moment's panic lest her mother should hear. Then she recalled her fury at Bobby's stolen kiss, and how she had hoped Arthur would "fight a duel" with him! She smiled faintly to think that, at sixteen, she should have been such a child; but her lip hardened. "He'll *have* to do something to him now!" Arthur had not horse-whipped the reptile for annoying her—that, of course, would have been childish. "But this is different—this lie! He will *have* to do something." It was dark in the carriage-house; only the lantern hanging on the harness rack cast a smoky glimmer on rotting leather of horse collars and cracked reins, and blinders whose brass rosettes were green with mold. The air was acrid with the smell of dust and rats and crumbling hay, and the looming coach looked like a cave of shadow in the murkiness under the rafters. It was like Lois to be here first. Her sort of love—always more eager to give than to receive—has no vanity of standing on its dignity. She waited there in her mourning, black in the blackness—but only for a minute. . . . The door swayed again, rolled aside, and he was there! He didn't see her in the darkness, until she ran to him. . . . Then his arms were about her.

She spoke first: "Oh, Arthur—they are dead. Tom and Harry. Both dead! Oh, Arthur—"

He pressed her head against his breast, and laid his cheek on the wet tendrils of hair about her fore-



head. She cried. He felt her trembling in his trembling arms. There was a broken sound in his throat, but he didn't speak. Then he led her over to one of the empty bins and they sat down. He held her hand, and she turned her face away, in a new and lovely fright that was dumb. He saw the exquisite back of her neck, the tender curve down to her shoulders, the little curls under the net that held a soft mass of hair glinting faintly in the lantern light. He heard her quickened breath. "It is so long!" he said. "So many years, Lois."

"So many, many years," she said.

He put his hand under her soft chin, and turned her face toward the light. "I'd sort of forgotten you were so pretty!" he said, wonderingly. In the glimmer of the lantern he could see her flush; then she glanced at him, sidewise, and smiled. His heart thumped suffocatingly; "If it had been a thousand years, I wouldn't have changed!"

"Wouldn't you?" she whispered. Then, all at once, the shyness vanished in the old faithfulness. "I wouldn't, either. You didn't ever doubt me, did you, Arthur?"

"Not doubt—no; I couldn't have doubted. But I—I wondered how you *could* go on loving me, because. . . . Things have happened. And people have hated me; so I've hated them. I haven't been worthy of you!"

"Arthur! Don't be foolish."

"It isn't foolish. It's true. I've acted like the devil to people! I know that." All of a sudden his bitterness was ebbing like a black tide. He was ashamed of his ugly angers; yet with the shame was a strange wonderfulness of *comfort*; the comfort a lost dog must feel when, after skulking in the cold and dark, he finds himself on a warm hearth. He was loved! He was trusted! He warmed himself at the little fire of her heart. "No, I'm not good, Lois. And once or twice I thought that when you found out what kind of a fellow I was, you'd stop loving me. . . . Lois, can you forgive me?"

She said, smiling, "You're an entire goose!"

"Say you forgive me—even though don't know how I've behaved!—though you'll hear it soon enough. . . . I'm a mighty poor thing, Lois." The abruptness of this new feeling of humbleness confused him. He had never felt humble before. He had been too wounded for humbleness.

She laughed his saving abasement aside.

"Say you forgive me," he insisted; but he laughed, too, just for happiness.

"I'll forgive anything!"

In this inflowing of her lovely love his soul was being washed clean of its contempts. "Lois," he said, huskily, "when I've been perfectly despairing and felt as if there was nothing for me to do but just—drop out; cut and run; go to China, maybe

and never come back—I've said my prayers to you."

"Oh, Arthur!" Her head drooped against his shoulder. He lifted her face and kissed her. They were silent. But he quivered. After a while he said, "Will your mother consent now?"

She shook her head. "Oh no. Of course we'll get married, sometime—maybe not until we're very old, but sometime. When we're thirty, perhaps. But just now—no; we can't. Oh, Arthur, *both* our twins!"

"You wouldn't have to go far away from her," he urged; "we could live near her. I can get some kind of work in Upper Chester—oh, I'm certain I can!" His certainty meant that love had swept away the rancor of his interview with old Mr. Watson; even that other insulting request for a reference seemed now unimportant. Reference?—of course he would get a reference! He would ask Dr. Lavendar to vouch for him. At that moment the heel of Love bruised the serpent's head! What Dr. Lavendar had called personal vanity, deepened into pride which is eager to sacrifice itself for Love—a thing vanity will never do. "People have been asses," he said, "but I know I can find a job!"

"Why, of course you can!" she said, not understanding his vehemence; "but there's no use thinking of getting married. Mother won't consent."

He began to protest—then stopped, in a daze of

memory. "Lois, I've loved you ever since you were a little bit of a girl in red mittens."

"I began to love you when—when Tom teased you," she said, "and you wouldn't fight him. Do you remember? I wanted to fight him for you! Dear Tom—" She sighed.

"Tom was a born fighter; he didn't know fear," Arthur said, simply.

She said, "Yes, he was always brave; but he was born that way—darling Tom!"

He didn't see pitifulness in the defending implication that he had not been born that way. He talked much of the twins—"there never were straighter fellows!" And she talked of her years at school and in Washington. Then he told her of his civilian work which reminded him of that disgraceful scene in the warehouse with his father. "I did one awful thing," he said; "I'll be ashamed of it as long as I live. I'll tell you about it, sometime." He couldn't tell her then. Instead, he spoke of the cabin: "I'm living up there. I've just hated the sight of people. So I've lived up there by myself."

"At *night*!" she said, dismayed.

"Yes; so far the bears haven't eaten me up."

"You won't go up there to-night?" she protested. "It's so dark!"

"Oh, Lois—you little, little, little *darling*!" He was so happy at her sweet foolishness of fear, that

he laughed loudly, and she said: "S-sh! Mother might hear."

"At least, nobody says I'm afraid of the dark," he said, chuckling; and she thought to herself that being with soldiers had probably made him braver in every way. But they didn't talk of bravery; only of Tom and Harry. And then of Emma. What would they have done without Emma—and her love stories, which had made her so sympathetic!

"She has been—oh, Arthur, I *couldn't* have kept my promise to Mother if Emma hadn't helped me. It was awful to deceive Mother. Sometimes it made me feel just entirely sick. But I didn't really break my word, did I? I didn't write to *you*; I just wrote to Emma. But, oh, Mother—poor Mother ought to have let us—love each other." This was a whisper against his cheek.

Then she laughed, sat up, and pulled at a small gold chain around her slender neck; a little worn silk bag came up from the white shelter of her breast. She put it into his hands; it was warm.

"What is it?" he said. She told him. The blood rushed into his face; he caught the bag to his lips, then opened it, and held in his hands—trembling hands!—the letter he had sealed all those years ago; still sealed, still unread, crumpled from lying against her heart. "Oh, what do I care what they say about me?" he said; "Lois! When can we be married? *When?*"

"Oh, Arthur, sometimes I get frightened and think 'never.' "

*'Lois!'*

"Mother will never consent. It isn't just the twins; this lie of Bobby Buttrick's—"

"I know."

"Oh, I can't bear to tell you, but Mother—believes it."

"Everybody believes it."

"Don't mind them!"

"I don't. Not in the least! It's nothing to me." His voice denied his words.

"Arthur! Find out where he is—Emma says they went to Kansas. Make him say he lied!"

His arm about her waist was suddenly listless. "Never."

"What do you mean?" she said, puzzled.

"I've got you, so I don't care any more. But I never have cared. And now the past is past. What difference does it make what they think?" The outgoing tide of bitterness had turned, and was flooding in again.

Lois struck her fist on the lid of the oat bin. "I would like to just entirely kill him!" she said.

"What would be the use of killing him?" His voice was strange to her—a sneering voice that she had never heard—a voice that made her cringe. "People have always thought things about me. I've

been a 'sissy,' and a 'coward,' and a 'liar.' Now, thanks to Mr. Robert Buttrick, I'm a 'thief.' "

She was aghast at this new, hard Arthur; an Arthur she had never known. "Oh, why do you talk like that?"

"I darned stockings to earn money. You remember that? So I was a 'sissy.' And I said war was wrong—but underneath I was 'afraid.' So I was a 'coward'; *and* a 'liar,' because I wouldn't admit I was afraid. You see?"

"You weren't a liar! You *did* think it was wrong. You never told a lie in your life."

"I never have, but I might as well—so long as they think I have. Now they say I 'sold things to soldiers,' which were to be given away!"

"Arthur, if just this once you'd kill Bobby Buttrick, people would know you didn't."

"I wouldn't turn my hand over to make them know it. I wouldn't deny it to anybody!"

Lois stared at him. In the smoky light from the lantern she saw the harsh line on his cheek, that had once been a dimple, twitch with angry pain. "I think you ought to deny it, for my sake," she said, simply.

Arthur flinched.

"You must!" she said.

There was a pause; then he said: "I can't, Lois. I *can't*!"

Her heart stood still. "You—can't?"



He must have felt her recoiling astonishment; but he only said, coldly, "I won't." There was a blank silence; then she said faintly, "I must go home."

"You love me, even if I won't? You said you would forgive me anything!" he reproached her, not knowing whether to be serious or not.

She turned her face away and began to tie her handkerchief into knots. He was just a little impatient. Why did she care what a lot of fools thought, now, when she and he had just entered paradise?

"Lois!"

There was no reply. His impatience turned into perplexity; was she really provoked at him because he wouldn't notice the damnable thing? "Lois—you understand? . . . Nobody would believe me if I did deny it. And, anyway, I—I won't."

Still she didn't speak; she couldn't speak. Terror had stabbed her. Her whole mind was just one silent question. She answered it, voicelessly, "*No!*"

Arthur, chilled by her silence, had nothing to say. And, in his dumbness, the old hard reticence, which in those first glowing moments had thinned and wavered, suddenly closed again over his mind. He got up, stretching out his hand to help her rise; then he took the lantern from the hook on the harness rack, and went ahead of her, the shadows lurching back and forth, back and forth, across the rough planking of the floor. "Be careful, Lois," he cau-

tioned her; "don't trip." But he didn't touch her; he didn't quite want to—she was provoked at him! Lois, provoked? *Lois*, who had never in her life said a cross word to him! In his bewilderment he didn't know that he was a little provoked himself. At the Clarks' back door, where Emma was waiting for her, he said, stumblingly, something about "to-morrow night—we'll decide things." When he kissed her, his lips felt a warm wetness on her rain-cold cheek, and he had an instant's surge of passion. Yet when he turned away to go up to his cabin in the dark, he felt shriveled inside: Lois didn't see that he could not deny the thing. She didn't understand! . . . The shock of her lack of understanding made him forget the taste of those silent tears. "I'll explain to her to-morrow night," he said to himself; "but I'll never deny it!"

Lois, brushing past Emma without a word, ran up the back stairs to her own room. She lit her lamp with shaking fingers, then stood panting. She felt a slow, cold sinking; she was caught in the quicksands of a possibility:

*"He said he couldn't deny it."* She lifted her bent arm across her eyes, as if warding off a blow, and said again, under her breath, *"No!"* Then, with a long breath, she faced her fear. Had he done—not exactly what Bobby said, of course; but *something*? She remembered his confused words about some

"awful thing." And then his other words: he would be "ashamed as long as he lived." Perhaps he had needed money; Arthur had never had pocket money, "like our twins." Perhaps he just had to have money, and so he sort of—of borrowed it? Meaning to pay it back. Oh, of course, Bobby was a liar!

Then, through her struggle to escape from the deadly *possibility*, and be certain that Bobby Buttrick was a liar, came a thrill of recollection: he had asked her if she loved him, even if he wouldn't deny the lie—and she hadn't answered him! "Of course I *do*. But why didn't I say so!" . . . Oh, she had hurt him! How cruel she had been to hurt him. She didn't know it, but her distress at herself was something tangible, something to clutch at to lift herself out of the bog of suspicion. "Why didn't I say, 'Of course I love you, whether you do anything to Bobby or not'!" But instantly the quicksand sucked her down again: had his question meant—"Would she love him if he didn't do anything to Bobby?"—or, "*Would she love him if he hadn't been honest?*" She sat down and hid her face in her hands. She sat there a long time; sometimes staring with dry eyes into space; sometimes bending forward, her hands locked between her knees. When, after a long time, she straightened up, her soft lips were rigid. "I will forgive anything; I love him, anyhow. But I won't believe it,

unless he says so. And he won't say so! Because it's an entire lie. And I know it's a lie. He'll deny it—to me. And I'll tell him I don't mind his not making Bobby say it's a lie. *I'll say it is!*"

She went over to the window and looked across at the Kays' house. A light in the loft blinked at her through the rain. Mrs. Kay was probably sitting there with that—that creature. "Instead of taking care of Mary, she'd better have stamped out the lie about Arthur!" Lois thought; "he was away and couldn't defend himself." . . . But why wouldn't he defend himself now? Well, never mind; Lois would defend him! "He's up there in his cabin, all alone—and he thinks I don't love him!"

By and by, sighing, she began to take down her hair, her tear-stained face looking back at her from the little swinging mirror on her bureau. Suddenly she stopped pulling out hairpins and held her breath; then, under her tears, her whole face steadied into purpose. She tumbled the soft hair back into its chenille net, thrust the hairpins in again, opened her door, and looked across the hall at her mother's room. There was no light along the sill or glimmering through the keyhole. "She is so tired; I do hope she's asleep and not crying about the twins!" The house was very still. "If Arthur had died I would have been crying. But, oh, it's

worse to have him suffer because I was cruel, than to have him die. I failed him," she thought. "I'm like everybody else—suspecting him; but I don't now—I don't now!" Again, just for a moment, she was clear of the quicksand—she was sure she was as bad as all Old Chester! Closing her door very quietly she went through the back entry to Emma's room, and knocked.

Emma, in her nightgown, peered out with a scared face. "I thought it was your ma! What on *airth*?"

Lois, pushing in, put her arms around the big fat neck and burst out crying. "Emma, he's so unhappy!"

Emma, sitting down, drew the little figure into her lap. "Now child!—what ails you?"

"He's so unhappy—people are so cruel—"

"He'll git over it, now he can see you."

"But I was cruel, too—I—" she stopped; she couldn't tell Emma how cruel she had been; still less could she tell even Emma of her shameful moment of *fear*. No; all she could do was to repeat that Arthur was unhappy. "And he has gone back to the cabin, all by himself; and I *must* tell him I love him!"

"Ain't you been tellin' him so out in the carriage-house for the last hour? Why, he'll git tired of it," Emma said, jocosely; "a young man likes to be a mite uncertain, lovey."

"No, I—I didn't tell him. That's what is just—*killing* me. Oh, I must tell him!"

"You can, to-morrow night."

"I can't wait until to-morrow night. I'm going to tell him now. Please come with me, Emma."

"Up to the woods? Now? You're out of your little head!"

"Emma, *please*. I'll get the lantern."

"My dear, it ain't becoming fer a young lady to run after a young man. And in the night time! It ain't proper. And anyway it's pouring."

"It isn't raining very hard, and I'll get the big umbrella. And it will be all proper if you come with me, Emma darling—"

"An' me in my ni-gownd?"

"Put on your dress, and I'll get Mother's rubbers for you, and her waterproof—"

"It's two miles up there to his cabin—and the woods is dark as a pocket!"

"I'd go by myself," Lois said; "I don't mind the rain, or *anything*! But Mother would think it wasn't ladylike; it's after ten—"

"Not 'ladylike'?" Emma said; even Emma saw the humor of that! "She'd say it was worse than not 'ladylike'! Now, go back to your bed, and—"

"Please, please come with me, Emma. You won't get wet—you can have all the umbrella! If you don't, I'll go by myself."

Well, it was only what might have been expected

of Emma—faithful, respectable, literary Emma! She went, protesting and grunting, and holding the enormous umbrella over Lois, who huddled at her side, the carriage-house lantern swaying from the crook of her little arm.

“Supposin’ your ma was to take a notion she wanted a cup of tea,” said Emma, “an’ come to my door? Heavens and *airth*! What then?”

“She won’t,” Lois reassured her, “she’s asleep.”

“Well, I won’t wait fer you but a minute,” Emma warned her. “Now I tell you! I ain’t goin’ to catch my death, fer no loving—”

“Oh no, no!—I’ll only be a minute, Emma darling. I’ll only need a minute to tell him that I—” the last words were not spoken, “love him—*anyhow*.”

Sometimes the umbrella caught on a low bough, sometimes a gust spattered their faces with rain; the light from the lantern gleamed on the muddy path and the drenched leaves, and back in the woods there was always the whispering drip from the branches. Twice poor Emma, twisting an ankle on a slippery pebble, sighed and said, “I’m a reg’lar fool!”

By and by they saw ahead of them, among the trees, the twinkle of his light. A minute later they whispered together: “Emma, isn’t that a shed, back of the cabin? You wait in there. It will be dry.”



“Dry! Dry as the Flood, I guess. Now mind, I ain’t goin’ to sit there and git damped through. Well, I wouldn’t ’a believed I was sich an old fool! Don’t you stay only a minute.”

“No, no; I’ll only be a second!”

## Chapter Eleven

HE HAD walked up the hill, frowning with dismay. "She doesn't understand, and she's angry," he said to himself. Angry—simply because he wouldn't notice Bobby Buttrick's lie! It was incredible. "But I certainly won't notice it," he said. He was puzzled, but he was no longer provoked; he was uneasy. Why should she want him to deny the thing? What difference did it make whether people believed it or not? When he unlocked his door and fumbled about in the darkness for a match, his uneasiness had sharpened into fear; was it possible that Lois, who knew him as nobody else on earth knew him, doubted him?—like everybody else! Was that why she wanted him to deny it? He felt a sort of spiritual nausea. Mechanically he started his fire, then hung his wet coat in front of it to dry. "No!" he said, "*that's* nonsense. Of course she doesn't!" But the mere question made his house of life tremble so, that he said again, with a sort of scared violence, "Absurd!—what a damnable thought to have about Lois. I ought to be kicked." . . . Why she had been faithful to him for all these years; loved him and believed in him

and defended him—unsustained by other people's belief, uncomforted even by his own assurances, or, now, by his own denial. Of course she didn't doubt him! Yet she said he "must" deny it? "Oh, well, she just doesn't understand," he said, pushing the logs of his fire together with a steaming boot; "if it was possible for her to think I did it—well, *that* would be the end of me— I'd clear out and never come back again!"

He heard the door open, and turned quickly. She was standing on the threshold; behind her was the black oblong of the rainy night; the light from his fire wavered on her rain-wet face. "Arthur," she said, "I have come." She came in, closed the door, and stood with her back against it. "I had to come," she said.

He would have caught her in his arms—but she raised her hand as if to say "no"; then stood, in her dripping waterproof, looking at him solemnly. "Can you tell me you didn't do it?" she said, gently.

He recoiled as though she had struck him in the face.

"I want," she said, "to tell people it is a lie."

"You can't. I won't tell you so."

Instantly she *knew*! She drew an anguished breath. . . . There was just a second's pause; then, horror and pain and condemnation, lifting into Love, vanished—as mists lift and vanish before the sun!! She ran to him, her wet cloak dropping about her

feet, her arms outstretched. But Arthur, with a queer, staggering step, as if getting his balance in a sudden earth tremor, held her from him, his repelling hand harsh against her breast.

"Please!" he said, breathlessly. "*Don't.*" (She was "forgiving" him! He thought swiftly of his gun; "they'd say it was an accident," flashed through his mind.) But she had pushed his hand away and caught him to her; her face was against his, her voice a murmurous tenderness of sound without words. Her love encircled him, held him, brooded upon him! Then he heard a whisper: "I understand. I know. I love you. . . ." It was the love that passeth knowledge.

But he tried to escape from her arms, straining him to her so that he felt her heart pounding against him. He said, with a gasp: "Please don't say anything more." (To himself he was saying, "If I can just get away!") He was in terror lest he might hear, "I forgive you.") "You couldn't love me," he said; "I wouldn't want you to, because—"

"But I do! I do! I've come to tell you—and, oh, Arthur, let us get married—" She sobbed on his breast.

He was dazed. "I don't know what you mean? If you don't trust me, you can't love me."

She lifted her white, strained face and just looked at him. "I trust you forever."

If Arthur had been all she thought him, and

worse (if there can be anything worse!) that trusting would have saved him. "I want you to know that I understand—*everything*," she said. "And I was cruel to try and make you deny it, and not tell you that I loved you, anyhow. Anyhow! And when I got home I couldn't bear to think how cruel I had been. You up here, all by yourself! So I came to ask you to forgive me, and to tell you that I want to marry you *now*, because people are so unkind to you. I've got to hurry—Emma's out in the shed. I just came to say, please, please let's get married!"

"You love me, even if—if I—" He was stammering in the confusion of terror and sudden hope.

"I do! I do!" She caught his hand to her lips. "Everybody in the world can hate you—it doesn't make any difference to me! I know you, Arthur; *I know you*. I love you—"

He stared at her—trying to draw his hand away from her soft, quivering mouth, but she held it there. "Even if I won't deny it?" he said.

"Even if you won't deny it."

"You see—I can't?"

"I know you can't."

"And you don't want me to do anything to Buttrick?"

She cried out, sharply, "No—no—*of course not*."

He thrilled at that;—oh, she did understand! A sense of their oneness shook him, so that for a

moment he could not speak; instead, he knelt down, clasping her knees and hiding his face in her skirts.

"We will never talk about it any more," she said.

Then he leaped up and put his hands on her shoulders, and held her from him, looking into her eyes. "Forgive me," he said. She looked up at him, smiling, the tears running down her face. He caught her to his breast. There was a speechless moment; his tears mingled with hers. But when she drew away, her lips crushed and trembling, her face, so young with those tears of passion, was suddenly old with passionless love—selfless, protecting love.

"Do you forgive me?" he insisted. "Oh, Lois, *can* you forgive me?"

"Yes, yes, *yes!*" she said, and laid her cheek against his as a mother might have done.

"Now I *must* go!" she said. "I just came up to tell you—Emma will be furious"—(she was shaking so that she had to be foolish); "Emma will simply kill me if I wait another second!"

He was so dazed by the shock of returning faith, that he let her go to Emma without a word. But the next minute he rushed after her, caught the lantern out of her hand, and held the umbrella over her—regardless of her protests about Emma, although he did pause to put an arm around the dear, scolding old soul and squeeze her until she squeaked.

"To-morrow night!" he said in Lois' ear; "in the carriage-house."

She nodded. For the rest of the way she was silent, but he talked excitedly of things Emma might hear.

As for Emma, she had her own thoughts: "Supposin' her ma has gone into her room while we been out? O Lord!" Emma was so scared she shivered, and said, crossly, "My feet's sopping. I believe I've caught my death!" Yet at the Clarks' back door she gave Arthur a smacking kiss. "You're a nice boy, and I don't give shucks for that Buttrick feller; but if you ain't good to my Lovey, I'll kill you!"

Two days later the old minister of the True Followers in Upper Chester married them. There was nothing else they could do but get married! Lois knew that her mother would not scruple to keep them apart by even more radical separation than living in Washington. "She said she'd take me to California," Lois said. . . . They had talked things over that next night in the carriage-house, but neither of them referred to that awful moment in the cabin when he had had a glimpse of her reality—and she had gone blind to his. "You are willing to run away?" he had said, almost with awe, for it was she who had suggested it.

"I want to," she said.

They started for their walk to Upper Chester at



daybreak. Emma, moving on tiptoe about the kitchen, gave Lois a cup of coffee, and urged, in a whisper, "a piece," as they used to call it in Old Chester. Lois, with a new rigidity in her face, shook her head.

"I can't eat anything. Oh, Emma, I do love Mother, but she'll think I don't. It just entirely kills me to think of hurting her! I left a letter to her on my pincushion. You give it to her, when she comes downstairs. Oh, Emma, do you think she will forgive me? I *have* to go to Arthur; he has nobody else. And I'll be with Mother all I can." Her face twitched with tears.

Then, in the foggy dawn, she left her mother's house. She was "running away." To Lois Clark this was a desolating thing; a marriage with no triumph of a wedding in it. A marriage which would bring down upon her the disapproval of all her little world, not only because she was marrying a coward and a thief, but because she was deserting her mother—leaving her wounded and alone, in a house emptied by death. Yes, this "running away," this renouncing of pride, this failure in duty, this reckless indifference to what would become of her—for how were they going to live?—was a terrible thing, whatever way Lois looked at it.

Emma saw them off. She stood at the back door, watching them through misting steel-rimmed spectacles, until they were lost in the fog. "She's got

plain in her looks overnight," Emma thought, wiping her eyes on the corner of her blue gingham apron; and she was right; the pain of disillusionment, and the misery of choosing between a mother saddened by Death, and a lover embittered by Life, had made her face almost old.

When they had opened and closed the gate and were in the road, Lois said, very low: "Arthur, we'll never speak of—of—of—you know what?"

He said, passionately, "No, never!"

"You forgive me for not saying, right away, that I loved you just the same? That nothing made any difference?"

And he said, "Do you forgive *me*, for not denying it, when you asked me to?" He didn't ask forgiveness for that horrible moment of distrust in the cabin. He was too much ashamed of it. He just fell back on the triviality of his refusal to notice Buttrick's lie. "You know I can't?"

"I know. I understand."

Arthur had got his license, and a funny little ring with tiny turquoises set to make a forget-me-not—not at all a wedding ring! And he had arranged with the minister of the True Followers to marry them. He had not seen the saintly old man since that day when he had been so deeply wounded by the Brethren, and when he asked him to marry them he did it apprehensively—lest there should be another wound. "If he asks me any questions,"

Arthur thought, contemptuously on the defensive, "we'll go to the mayor's office in Mercer!" But there were no questions; they went into the empty chapel, bare and still and smelling of Bibles, and stood in front of the mystical old man, whose dim eyes looked through earthly love to that heavenly love which is not dependent upon merit—a love he must have seen in little Lois' brave, frightened eyes! He blessed them and let them go. Then he called them back:

"My son, henceforth be worthy of her." And to Lois he said, "My daughter, God has his past—but you have his future." She looked up at him and nodded slightly; he smiled. They both understood. He seemed to give no thought to the fact that they were "running away." Perhaps he did not really know it.

They came back to Old Chester on the afternoon stage, man and wife. They had waited for it by the roadside, sitting in the hazy sunshine under a great locust tree on the bank of the river, looking at the brown ripples and eating some bread and butter Arthur had bought at a friendly farmhouse. They talked very little—they were very shy with each other. Once Arthur said, "If Old Chester blames you—!"

And Lois said, "I won't mind. I won't mind *anything*, if you are happy. . . . And good."

"I am not used to being happy," he said, simply,

"but I will try to be good." Then they talked about the weather, and the war, and Lois' new ring. Arthur's nearest approach to a confidence was when he said, "If you hadn't loved me, I'd have—well, gone off and never come back!" And hers was: "You need me more than Mother does." After that they talked about their mothers. She would go to hers as soon as they got into town; then he would tell his. It had not occurred to him to break the news, as Lois had done.

"I asked Mother to forgive me, in my letter," Lois said, whitely; "but perhaps she won't."

He said: "There'll be no trouble about my mother. She's reasonable!"

Before the runaways reached Old Chester, the mother who was not reasonable had had several hours in which to recover from the shock of the pin-cushion letter with its plea for forgiveness. Emma, handing her lady the toast at the breakfast table, mentioned that she thought Miss Lois was sleeping late. "She looked last night like she had a headache."

"You were quite right not to disturb her," Ellen said. So it wasn't until noon, when Emma felt sure that Miss Lois was safely married and couldn't be "disturbed," that she came into the parlor, saying, in a quavering voice, "I found this here letter on Miss Lois' bureau." Then she fled.

Mrs. Clark, opening it, read the half dozen lines.

Then sat perfectly still. . . . It was a paralyzing blow; almost like the blow of reading Harry's name in the post office. Her first thought was, "I've lost her, too." The next moment came the relief of anger "*I'll stop it!*" The letter shook in her hands as she read it again to see where she must go to stop it! But Lois said only that she was going to marry Arthur. She didn't say where she would go to be married. At first her mother didn't take this fact in. When she did, she said, frantically, "Probably Philadelphia! His mother will know!" She did not wait to put on her bonnet—just threw a shawl over her shoulders and flew out of the house into the Kay garden. She was quivering with passion, yet, curiously enough, as she ran past the lattice—on which before the war, before the twins were killed, before Arthur Kay had stolen Lois, morning-glories had held the sky in perfect chalices—a stab of memory made her think of that queer thing Major Kay had said about the blueness and the dew: "The Holy Ghost!" She had not known then what he meant, and certainly she did not know now—when the morning-glory leaves hung limp, brown and rotting on the trellis, and the boys were dead, and Lois had deserted her to run away with a thief! No; the sweet, angry woman could not understand something which poor, dissipated George Kay had long ago discovered—namely, that valor and shame and forgiveness and the morning-

glories were all God. . . . She only knew the pain of wounded maternal love. Her tears overflowed, but at the Kays' door anger burned them up.

Mrs. Kay, summoned from the loft by Betsey's panicky voice (of course Betsey was in the secret!)—"Mis' Clark's yere, ma'am,"—called down, patiently, "In a few minutes, Betsey." She had to finish combing Mary's hair—a long task of restraining restless hands, and gentle loosening of snarls, and firm, tight braiding. (She had never cut Mary's hair, because in dim moments of consciousness the poor creature seemed to take pleasure in her handsome black locks.) When the combing was done, Mrs. Kay—surprised at a visit from anybody!—went downstairs, and there was her neighbor, standing in the hall. Before she reached the lowest step, Mrs. Clark handed her Lois' terrible little letter—then drew back, and stood, with compressed lips, watching her read it.

"Where have they gone!" Ellen demanded.

"I don't know." They stared at each other. Then Agnes Kay said, "You do not deplore this any more than I do."

Well! Women differ, but mothers-in-law are all alike—each of these mothers-in-law felt that the other mother-in-law's child was to blame. However, neither of them said so; and though Mrs. Clark was hot with anger, and Mrs. Kay as calm as ice, the confusion of their dismay settled, before

they parted, into the realization that they were equally helpless. The fugitives would have been married before they could possibly be separated—even if anyone knew where to go to separate them!

So the day passed—one mother rushing about and pouring her despair into Old Chester's horrified ear; the other, sitting in the loft listening to mumbling calls for flowers—"Bouquet! bouquet!" But each mother told herself that she had lost her child.

Then, in the late afternoon, the stage jogged into town, and the two children got out at Mrs. Clark's door. Eloping girls do not usually return to outraged mothers the same day; so Ellen Clark, not expecting the runaways, was out when they arrived. She was still demanding sympathy:

"How she could *look* at him is more than I can understand!"

"I would get a divorce for her, *immediately*, if she was my daughter," somebody said—as if a divorce could be served like a writ, on perfectly contented husbands and wives. But the remark showed how Lois' behavior was regarded, for in Old Chester to be divorced was just about as disgraceful as to be hanged. "But she *can't* be permitted to have a thief for a husband!" said Old Chester.

"I am almost glad the boys didn't live to see it!" Ellen said; "only, of course, one of them would have shot him!"

"I must say, flatly and frankly," one comforter



declared, "that if you had brought her up differently, Ellen, this wouldn't have happened"—a remark which shocked poor Ellen into the realization that when children go wrong, everybody (except their parents) knows that it is their parents' fault. "People will blame *me!*" she thought, appalled. "Well," she encouraged herself as, exhausted with anger, she started home, "at any rate, I won't put the marriage in the Bible! Yes, I will. I'll put it among the deaths! She's dead to me. Oh, my little girl! No, I won't put that boy's name in the same book with Harry's and Tom's! Oh—my honey! All I had left. How could she? I hope I'll never lay eyes on him as long as I live," she said. Then, her face red and haggard with tears held back until she could cross her own threshold and be alone, she opened her front door—and there, if you please, in the parlor, was Arthur Kay, with his arm around Lois! Now really, even though she ought to have "brought Lois up differently," one has to sympathize with Lois' mother, laying eyes on *that*. "He is brazen!" she said to herself.

Lois said, "Mother, you are not angry?"

Not angry! Poor Ellen had no words for a minute. Then she spoke with hard composure: "Of course I am angry. Very. Your conduct, Lois, is inexcusable. I had supposed you had *some* affection for me. However, that is a small matter, compared with the terrible mistake you have made for your-

self. As for you"—she looked at Arthur—"my sons are not here to protect their sister—which is, of course, the reason that you dared to impose upon the affection of an innocent girl. I wish never to see you again, Arthur Kay."

"Then you won't see me, Mother," Lois said.

Her mother ignored that. "Let me look at your marriage certificate," she said. Arthur produced it. She glanced at it. "I suppose it isn't a forgery?"

"Oh, *Mother!*" Lois said, then forgave the insult, and ran to her and tried to put her arms around her, and lay her face against the hot, wet cheek. "*Try, try, to forgive me! I do love you, Mother!*"

"You have broken my heart! I have no child left." Then came another flare of anger. "As for forgiving you—I'm ashamed of you!—because you have no shame. And I shall get a divorce for you—"

At that, Arthur, catching at Lois' hand, drew her back into the shelter of his arm. "Mrs. Clark, no one shall speak of 'shame,' to Lois! Come," he urged his wife; "we won't listen!"

"I will speak, then, of shame to you," she said; "that my daughter, the sister of brave and manly, and—and *honest* men, Arthur Kay, should marry *you*, is incredible."

Neither the husband nor wife answered. He was too angry, she too frightened. He just led her out

of the house. "We'll go home," he said; "my mother will understand."

In the Kay house they waited in the cold parlor until Lois was calm; then they climbed the long flights of stairs to find the other mother. On the third floor they could hear, from up in the loft, the patient voice:

"Lord Lovel stood at his castle gate—"

Ever since the news came she had been sitting on the little cowhide trunk outside Mary's room; a wet sheet on the line between the chimney-stacks dripped softly on the rough planking of the floor; in the brown dusk of the October afternoon the hanging garments along the eaves, and the piles of bandboxes, and even the hoop skirt tilting out from the wall, were almost invisible. By and by the loft was dark; but she had not the energy to light her lamp; she just sat there, her head, with its short gray hair, resting against the door frame, and her hands gripped together in her lap.

"Combing his milk white steed,"

she sang, but brokenly, for her lips were trembling. Arthur had married without her consent. Without even telling her he was going to! She had lost her son. "He doesn't love me," she thought.

"Mother—"

She looked around, startled; the two children were coming down the loft, hand in hand.

"We're married," Arthur said.

"I'm aware of it," she said; with a quick movement she closed Mary's door, and rose; "and I am displeased." She put up a furtive finger and wiped a gleaming wet streak from her cheek.

"I'd like to tell you about it. Then you won't be displeased."

"There is nothing to tell which could lessen my displeasure, Arthur. The 'running away' was improper. I am surprised that Lois consented to such a thing—"

Lois broke in, "I asked him to."

"*Asked* him!" Agnes Kay was dumb. Her boy married to a girl who could do a thing like that! For a sinking moment she felt, as mothers have been apt to feel since sons began to choose wives—that her son's choice was a repudiation of the influences which had surrounded him ever since he was born! But she only said, "I am sorry you cheapened yourself, Lois." Then she put her hand on the girl's shoulder and looked for a silent moment into the innocent eyes. To her surprise, her own eyes blurred. "Be good to her!" she told Arthur; then something made her give the child a meager kiss. After all, Lois couldn't be wholly foolish, for she believed in him—she loved him! For a moment Lois' simple face was to Agnes Kay what the morn-

ing-glories had been to her husband: dawn and dew, and the Cup of communion—for Love is the Unfathomable Glory. Yet she could only express it in her own way: “I will try and be just. Take Lois down to the spare room, Arthur; and tell Jane to put an extra place at table. I shan’t come to supper. Mary is fussy.”

In the spare room, where the evening dusk turned the great four-posted bedstead into a dim island and made the mirror, hanging lengthwise above the fireplace, glimmer like a still pool in the woods, Arthur took his wife in his arms and let her cry upon his heart.

## Chapter Twelve

"**I**S SHE very angry at me, Emma?"—this in a whisper the next morning in the Clark kitchen; "Oh, Emma, doesn't she *know* I love her?"

"'Course she knows it! But she won't let on. And she's mad at *him*. I don't know as I blame her! But your ma never holds her mad longer 'an a puddin' holds heat. She'll simmer down—'bout you. An' some day she'll take to him. But don't push him on her. Now mind what I say! Pushin' people on people only sets 'em in their mad."

Ellen Clark was certainly still mad—at Arthur! But she had begun to simmer down about Lois, though she turned her back on her when the child came up to her bedroom. But Lois wouldn't let her turn her back! She put her arms around her and said, "Mother, please listen!"

"I don't want to hear anything you can say, Lois. Arthur Kay has done an unpardonable thing. He led you into it! Of course, I blame him entirely—"

"No, Mother; I—"

"I'll forgive *you*; you've done wrong, but"—Lois was kneeling beside her, holding the impetuous, maternal hands against her fresh lips. "I'll never forgive him, never!"

"Mother, darling, I love you."

"You don't love me—or you wouldn't have done it. Oh, honey, you were all I had left! How could you!" She broke down and wept on her daughter's shoulder.

"I think I've always loved him," Lois said. "Ever since I can remember, I've loved him—because people have been so unkind to him."

"That's no reason for marrying him! Oh, I ought never to have come back to Old Chester!" Ellen Clark said, wildly, and wiped her eyes on the sleeve of Lois' dress; "but I thought you'd got over it. I gave you the credit of believing that you wouldn't look at him! Oh, I can't understand how you *could*. He's a coward—and your brothers died for their country! And even when he was a boy he was so crazy to make money, he sewed! And now, selling those socks—"

"Mother, don't blame him; he was born—timid. And besides, he is a True Follower; he couldn't go to war."

"He is certainly a *follower*," Ellen said, hotly; "he 'followed,' and let better men go on ahead and be killed. And he's untruthful—"

"No—no! Arthur has never told a lie! Even now he won't say what isn't true."

"You mean he won't say he didn't sell things to the soldiers? I thought at least he'd have the grace to deny it!"



"If he is sorry, why should he deny it? That would be another—wrong thing."

"But what excuse does he make?"

"He doesn't make any excuse."

"But what did he say when you asked him why he did it?"

"I didn't ask him. I will never ask him."

Her mother was speechless with horror.

"Oh, Mother, can't you forgive him? God forgives us—"

"Don't be irreverent, and talk about God!" Ellen Clark said, in a fresh outburst of anger. "To take advantage of an innocent girl—a girl so innocent that she doesn't even understand how dreadful his behavior is! Oh, what would the twins say! No—I'll never forgive him; I'll never speak to him again as long as I live!"

"You've forgiven me."

"Oh, you poor child—you poor child!" her mother said, and put her arms around her and kissed her, and they cried together. "And no wedding dress and veil! Did he give you a ring? What! That cheap thing? It isn't a wedding ring at all, and it looks like an imitation. And how is he going to support you? Where are you going to get your bread and butter? And does he expect you to live in that insane asylum next door?"

"I reckon you'll maybe give me something to eat?"

Lois said, coaxingly; and that made poor Ellen smile through her tears.

When Lois went downstairs, she ran out into the hall and called over the banisters, "You can bring him to supper to-night. We'll have fried chicken."

It was another hour or two before she went down to the parlor and opened the big Bible. "I've *got* to do it sometime," she said; and set her teeth and hunted between the Apocrypha and the New Testament for the gilt-bordered page of Marriages with its pictured bride and groom and surpliced clergyman, all in a ring of orange blossoms. "Oh," the poor mother thought, writing Lois' name (and, yes, the horrible boy's, too!)—"oh, she didn't even have white gloves!" Then she told Emma what to have for supper. . . .

It was an awful supper (of course Lois said they must go)—of fried chicken, and waffles, and strawberry jam with thick, thick yellow cream; and many references to patriotism, and Lois' inheritance of soldier blood. At Agnes Kay's table during the next few days, there was no cream or waffles (or tarts). But there were occasional references to justice (which called itself forgiveness, and was no more like forgiveness than the judge's bench is like a mother's breast). But happily for the lovers, Arthur's mother didn't often appear at meals, Mary of late being more than usually fussy and having times of struggling for breath, which made it neces-

sary to hold her up to keep her from choking. It would be hard to say which mother-in-law made the young husband and wife more uncomfortable!

They only stood it for a week; then they went away up to Arthur's cabin, where they were very happy—although Lois, going down the hill every day to see her mother, sometimes came back looking as if she had been crying; and Arthur couldn't escape from the worry of having no job. Still, they were happy, not knowing that their happiness was built upon a delusion. It is difficult to see how there can be delusion where people love each other. Certainly there can't be a sustained delusion. In the intimacy of love, especially of married love, a word, a gesture, a look, to say nothing of the inevitableness of a direct question—clears things up. But between these two there had been the long period of not seeing each other, or even writing to each other—for Emma's letters with their brief reports of happenings, didn't reveal changes in character nor the separating growth in temperaments; yet Lois' pitifulness had become more and more independent of reason, and Arthur's rationalizing had developed a hard self-sufficiency that did not know it needed pity. So misapprehensions were temporarily possible. Their hearts were intimate, but their minds were strangers. Nevertheless, the cold iron of Arthur's indifference to other people's opinion began up there in the cabin, to flush red in the flame of life. It

began to bend under the pressure of her tenderness for him. Perhaps if then he had been asked to deny, for her sake, Bobby Buttrick's story, he would have done it; he would have sacrificed self-love to Love. But now Lois could not ask for denial! She never spoke of his past—which the old minister had told her belonged to God; and he, somehow, dared not refer to it, not only because he felt that she shrank from it, but because of his own shame at having been such an idiot as to doubt her, even for a minute!

They stayed on in the cabin for nearly three weeks; then the November nights grew so cold that both mothers remonstrated in their different ways:

"When is that boy going to get something to do?" one mother said. "Until he does, and can give you a decent roof over your head, bring him here; I don't know how I can look at him! But he's your husband, so I've got to. You can have the whole of the third floor. Does he smoke? I hate a man who doesn't smoke!"

And the other mother said, "Lois is a foolish young woman, but she is your wife, and has a right to be here. Bring her."

Naturally, neither lover would be brought! Then Ellen Clark took the matter into her own hands. "This cabin nonsense," she told herself, "has got to stop. Lois will freeze up there! I'll tell his mother she must come home—so I suppose I'll have to take him, too. But may the Lord give me grace to hold

my tongue when I talk to her about him!" Grace must have been granted, for when she went to see the other mother her references to Arthur, though formal, were not unkind. She said that Lois really must spend the winter with her—"they are perfect babes in the woods, to think of living in that cabin in cold weather! I expect every day to hear that the robins have covered them with leaves," she said, trying to be pleasant.

"Arthur says they are comfortable," Mrs. Kay said, briefly.

They were in Agnes Kay's parlor—a beautiful room, but as austere as her mind. Mrs. Clark, while waiting (and praying that she might hold her tongue!), had contrasted its stately barrenness—cold gray walls, high undraped windows looking north, faded Arbusson carpet, funereal white marble mantelpieces over fireless grates—with the warm confusion of her own red-papered parlor, where the twins' pictures stood on the wooden mantelshelf above a bubbling soft coal fire, together with dear domestic trivialities of decalcomania and china shepherdesses. The Kay parlor was chilly even in midsummer, and now—"It's as cold as his cabin!" Ellen thought, shivering. (Agnes Kay never had a fire here. Why should she? The little stove kept the loft warm.)

"I have told Arthur to bring Lois here," she said.

"Oh, she would be *much* more comfortable with

me!" Mrs. Clark said, dismayed; then realizing the discourtesy of her startled truthfulness, she quickly changed the subject. "I have been wondering what the prospects are of Arthur's earning a livelihood? I will do all I can for Lois—but my means are small."

"Until people realize his honesty," Arthur's mother said, "there will probably be no opening for him."

"*'Until'?*" Ellen cried. "Why, then I'll have him on my—" (Here the Lord certainly intervened, for she didn't finish, "my hands, forever.")

But the other mother must have guessed the unspoken words, for her delicate, worn face flushed. "Pray have no anxiety," she said; for once she was elemental and angry. "My son, who is an able and *honest* young man, Mrs. Clark, can certainly support his wife. For the present—though I regret his marriage quite as much as you do—he may bring Lois here." She rose.

Ellen Clark, dismissed and reddening, rose also. "Not at all! I shall insist on Lois' coming to me—as a mere matter of comfort for her." (The Lord's grace failed!) "I will bid you good day, ma'am!"

"I will bid you good day, ma'am," Arthur's mother retorted. They bowed, Mrs. Kay's meager petticoats catching about her knees, and Ellen's black bombazine billowing in a great cheese.



It was while the two mothers were thus arranging their affairs for them that their children arranged their own affairs. Arthur came tearing up the hill to his cabin, from the post office. He had had a letter from Mr. Watson, offering him his old position! *Offering!* The triumph of that did more to adjust his relation to the moral universe than all the admonitions which he had heard from the lips of common sense in Old Chester. Of course later the mothers, informed, accepted the upsetting of their competing plans as well as they could. And in less than a week the babes in the woods, accomplishing their moving, found themselves in their own ugly little boarding-house heaven in Mercer. After which their mothers fell back into patient (and impatient) recognition of their own helplessness, and Old Chester, so ruffled by the whole performance, settled into the dullness of having nobody to talk about—until, mercifully, George Kay appeared, with a bang!

In looking back now, one wonders what Old Chester would have done for disapproval and horror without the Kay family—with its whisky bottles and lottery, its crazy woman, its indifference to hoop skirts, its elopement, its coward and thief!—and now its irate father. It was on a darkly warm December afternoon that, unannounced and unexpected, Major George Kay got out of the stage at the tavern door. The minute he arrived people seemed to spring out of the ground to greet him—to shake his



hand and drink his health! He was very martial and suave, and as generous as ever in ordering up at the bar; but he was preoccupied. He seemed to be watching for some one. Once or twice he glanced at the door.

"Lookin' fer anybody, Major?" Van Horn said.

Kay wheeled on him. "Yes, I am! I'm looking for a ——" the ugly softness of his next very profane words made Van Horn open his mouth. "I propose to have a short interview with Mr. Robert Buttrick—to supplement any attention my son may have paid him." He paused, as if to be told just what his son's "attention" had been; but no one enlightened him. Instead, there was a gasp in the crowded barroom. Then somebody cleared his throat and said he believed the Buttricks had moved out West.

"Well, then, perhaps one of you gentlemen will favor me with their address?" No one favored him, so George Kay, smiling ominously, went on: "An officer doesn't insult his pistol by pointing it at vermin. And I personally should hate to soil my boots by kicking Buttrick. But I reckon this will meet his case," he said, pleasantly. He drew a long, snake-like whip out of his pocket and laid it on the counter. "Of course," he said "I can begin on some of his friends," he gave a flashing glance around the room, taking in every startled face among the loafers; "later I'll go to headquarters."

Everybody began to talk at once! Nobody knew where the Buttricks were. Nobody believed Bobby's fool lie, anyhow! Must have been another fool that mentioned it to Major Kay. "It's too damned ridic'lous to talk about."

"Well," said George Kay, "it's astonishing how many ridiculous people there are in the world. That lie, assisted by such persons, crawled on its belly in the dust all the way down to New Orleans, and reached me just as I was starting North. I only stopped once on my way up here to track it to its dirty source, to buy this pretty thing," he lifted the whip carelessly—then suddenly cracked it! Everybody jumped. "Anyone present who believes that my son sold socks to Union soldiers? Speak up. Don't be shy!"

Apparently no one believed anything! Everybody was very shy. His audience melted like snow in the sun; and murmured, as it disappeared, "Good Lord, no! Nobody was such a fool—"

It was Van Horn who spoke in defense of Old Chester:

"The trouble was, the boy was too mad to deny it."

"Why didn't you deny it for him?" thundered the Major.

"He'd *ought* to 'a' said it wasn't so!" old Van Horn insisted; "but he wouldn't, not to nobody; not to Dr. Lavendar—an' Dr. Lavendar told him *he*

knew it was a damned lie! So did I," Van Horn added, getting quickly on the other side of the counter, for the Major was fingering the whip. "Arthur ought to 'a' *said* it was a lie," he repeated.

"Well, I'm here to say so," George Kay said, and with the whip coiled in one hand he went out. He didn't ask whether Arthur had used a whip himself; he was afraid to. But as he walked up the hill to his own house he told himself that the first thing to do, as a matter of justice, was to hear what excuse Arthur would make for not using a whip! "Though how I'm going to stand his turn-your-other-cheek stuff, I don't know. Religion," he reflected, "is very proper, of course. Very nice—in its place. But it must be kept in its place! It ought not to intrude in matters of honor." When the lie (Kay never for a moment doubted that it was a lie) had reached him in New Orleans, his first question had been about Arthur's "honor." "What did my son do?" The retailer of gossip squirmed, but "didn't just know. Hadn't heard"—which evasion, of course, told George Kay the mortifying fact that Arthur's religion had intruded. So he bought his whip and started North. At the tavern, still hoping in spite of himself for a story of chastising Honor, he guessed what had happened—or rather had not happened! It was incredible. "If he talks forgiveness to me," the Major thought—"the word makes me sick at my stomach!—I'll tell him God may behave

that way, but no gentleman does." At the iron gates of his great house he paused, tried to lift the latch, then put his knee and shoulder against the bars, shook them—and burst the gates in. The rust marks on his uniform made him say "Damn!" He opened the front door with a bang, then stood at the foot of the stairs, and called—"Arthur!"

No answer.

"Agnes!"

Silence.

"Betsey! Jane!"

Instant vociferations from the dining-room—from the kitchen! "Fer de land's sake!" "Yere's the Major!"

"Where's Mr. Arthur?"

The two women looked at each other, uneasy, but grinning. "Mr. Arthur and the bride they's livin' in Mercer—"

"Bride? What bride?"

The explanation made George Kay drop the whip and roar with laughter. "Eloped? The scoundrel! This is the best news since Lee's surrender. And little Miss Lois? God bless her! Well, well! The Pretty Dear! Where's Mrs. Kay?" He didn't wait to be told—he knew where she was—in that confounded loft! . . . "Eloped!—I didn't know he had it in him. I reckon he *is* my son, after all." He went leaping upstairs. On the third floor he

called: "Agnes! What's this about Arthur? Shall I come up?"

She called down, in an agitated voice, "*No!*—oh no! Please—" He heard her run across the loft floor and halfway down the twisting flight of steps. There she paused, and her lifted hand checked him. "Don't come up," she said, "*please!*" She looked dazed and tired; her short hair, generally tied back with a black ribbon, hung in disorder about her face—the stupid fingers had been worrying it. Her husband in the hall, very military and handsome, looked up at her with faint repulsion.

"What's this about his marrying Lois Clark?"

"Yes they are married." She came down another step or two.

"Was it really an elopement?"

She admitted, gravely, that it was.

"The Holy Ghost! Well, the Recording Angel can put it on the credit side, with 'one box on his respected father's ear'!"

"Can you speak more quietly?" she said, and glanced over her shoulder. But there was no sound in the loft, so she came down the rest of the steps. Her face twitched with fatigue. "I will tell you about it. Come in here," she said, and led the way into their boy's old room. There, sitting on the edge of the bed, she told him what had happened—constantly interrupted by her husband's delighted profanity. Suddenly he sobered. "But what did

Arthur do to Buttrick?—I heard in New Orleans how the cur had lied about him. What did he do to him?”

“Nothing, that I know of. The family had left town before Arthur came back. But it wasn’t worth noticing, George.”

She was so forlorn in the unloveliness of her disordered dress and hair, that he involuntarily paused in his questioning to say: “You look rather used up. You ought to have some one to help you in taking care of your friend. Is there anything I can do?”

The sarcasm of her sudden smile—like a gleam of pallid light on snow—of course escaped him. She said, briefly, “No, thank you.” So he went on about Buttrick: “Of course Arthur couldn’t notice the lie by denying it; no gentleman denies a lie; he merely cowhides the liar. Or shoots him. I did that once. Didn’t Arthur do anything?”

“Why should he? Revenge achieves nothing. It only gives pleasure to the avenger. Punishment is in the hands of God.”

Kay stared at her, open mouthed. Then he said, “He did *nothing*?”

“I hope he forgave him.”

Her husband said, softly, “Agnes, I believe, on the whole, I won’t go to Heaven. I ~~couldn’t~~ stand the company.”

There was a sound from the loft. “I must go!” she said, and ran up the winding steps.

### *Chapter Thirteen*

“**A**S SOON as I can find out where in hell the skunk is,” George Kay told Old Chester, “I shall haul him back here and skin him alive in the presence of my daughter-in-law, whom he has insulted by implying that she would marry a thief. Then I’ll give him his car fare back to the infernal regions.” He didn’t say anything about Arthur—who had left the skinning of the skunk in the hands of God! He was too mortified to refer to Arthur. His program, however, could not be immediately carried out, because nobody knew where the Buttricks were, and in those days the machinery for finding out didn’t work very quickly. The Major set it in motion as soon as possible, and while he waited for results he made calls—calls upon Dr. Lavendar, upon Benjamin Wright, upon William King, upon any other sensible people in town—to show his appreciation of their sense. And he called upon the idiots, to say, “I’m trying to get on the track of Mr. Robert Buttrick. Do you happen to know where he is living?” Then he let them see that snaky thing dangling out of his back pantaloons pocket.



But first of all he went to see Lois' mother. He didn't know whether she was sensible or not, but of course he left the whip at home. While he waited for her in the long, shabby comfortable parlor, with its red wall paper that the twins had loved, and where the prisms of the astral lamp on the center table caught glints of sunshine from the west windows, he saw on the mantelpiece the photographs of Tom and Harry in uniform, and went over to look at them. His face was bitter and ashamed. "I shan't blame the mother of those boys," he thought, "if she objects to having *my* boy in her family!" Then he heard her step, and turned to meet her. She was in black, of course, and her wide skirts were heavy with crêpe. The change in her—her black eyes tear-washed, her brave June-rose color faded, the lovely opulence of shoulders and bosom gone—touched him. He bowed in silent respect.

Ellen Clark's reception of Arthur's father was stately; every propriety was observed; but as she entered and saw him looking at the pictures on the mantelpiece, she felt his shame, and was glad! They talked of the weather. Then of the war. He spoke briefly, but with covered emotion, of the twins. She said that she was proud that they died as they did.

"You have reason to be," he said, simply; "and I am proud to have your sons' sister a member of

my family! I am deeply sensible, Mrs. Clark, of the honor your daughter has done Arthur."

"I should not be candid," she said, "if I did not say that I regret Lois' marriage."

He raised protesting eyebrows, and hoped she would forgive the scamp.

She was silent.

He said, good-naturedly, that of course Arthur had no business to run away with the Pretty Dear—"but we've all been young, Mrs. Clark!"—this with a droll look; but Mrs. Clark's face was stony. Then he overflowed as to Arthur's good fortune in marrying "a daughter of *yours!*—not only for the nobility of her character, but for that female charm which she has inherited." She was impervious. He proceeded: "I want you to know that the young lady will not be lacking in this world's goods."

"As my sons died for their country, Major Kay, my daughter will inherit all my property—such as it is. A fact which your son, no doubt, realized."

George Kay turned darkly red. He had expected her to be angry; but this stab about money made it look as if she had believed Buttrick's lie! He fenced: "It took courage in a young creature like Lois to run off with a boy who was being slandered by a pack of fools!"

Silence.

"Of course I am here to set that right."

Silence.

"It's astonishing to me that any, ah—intelligent person, believed it. But I hear there are two or three—?"

"I know of one," said Ellen, flinging up her head. He eyed her. "Lois—God bless her!—saw through the millstone with a hole in it."

"Lois knows the regrettable truth; it is her knowledge which makes her conduct so incomprehensible to me."

"Lois believes he *did* it?" he said, his lips parted with amazement.

She bowed. "Being, as you say, 'intelligent,' she has no alternative."

"Lois thought *that*?—and forgave him? Madam, God Almighty couldn't do more than that." His throat tightened; "I've always loved her," he said, huskily, "ever since she cried over the crocodiles—but I worship her, now! . . . Mrs. Clark, for your own personal relief, I will just say that the Little Dear's forgiveness, though divine, is unnecessary. The 'socks' story comes from a blackguard and a liar. I ought not to soil my lips even by denying it, but I must, for the sake of—my daughter-in-law. No one shall say that a lady of my name has a thief for a husband."

For a moment Ellen Clark couldn't speak; she knew, in a flash, that he was telling the truth; but to have the main and justifying reason for her passionate dislike of Arthur wrenched so abruptly from

her was a positive pain. "I *hope* you are correct," she began; "but—"

Then he blazed! "'Correct' do you say? Permit me to inform you that that fat fool's jealous slobbering about my son's honesty is incorrect!" Ellen, who was never at a lack for words, really shrank before his fury; she didn't even dare to say "How do you know it is?"—though she wanted to. When he added, sardonically indifferent, now, to female charm, "May I ask if you believe *me*?" she said, breathlessly, "Oh, certainly! Yes! I see that I was misinformed."

"You were!" Kay said; "and I need not point out to you, madam, the desirability of saying so, publicly!" He turned on his heel and slammed out of the room. But the next instant slammed back again: "Arthur must have told Lois it was a lie?"

She said—rather breathlessly she was so startled by his violence—"I believe he did not."

"But when she asked him?"

"She didn't ask him. She told me that she had asked him no questions and that she never would. Very foolish in her, but—"

"Foolish?" he broke in. "Madam, it was magnificent. My God! she is a *lady*!" Again he rushed out of the room, but this time he remembered to bow.

George Kay's aggressive protection of his daughter-in-law's husband, was all that was needed to clear

Old Chester of the poisonous gossip. He was like a whirlwind driving through an unclean fog. Of course some people, after they got their breath, murmured, "How does he *know* it's a lie?"—overlooking the elemental certainties of common sense. And there were a few who continued to whisper "socks!" This not because they really believed Bobby, but because they couldn't bear to give the precious fiction up. They were like dogs who snarl and snap if one tries to take away their rotten bones. Not even George Kay could pull the bone of his son's "dishonesty" from such folk in Old Chester.

"Let 'em alone," Mr. Benjamin Wright advised, peering at Arthur's father from under his crooked wig; "you can't change the leopard's spots. Your boy didn't even try to! I told every fool in town I sympathized with him. I told 'em the young ass was in High Company when he scorned Old Chester. I referred 'em to Proverbs III, 34."

Though his hearers had not been interested to find out how Deity regarded persons of their mental caliber, Old Chester, thanks to George Kay, came to itself, and was ashamed. Certainly Ellen Clark was ashamed—and the sensation was so unpleasant that it made her dislike Arthur more than ever. But she was an honorable woman, so she said coldly to one friend or another, "There seems to be no doubt that young Buttrick was misinformed about Arthur Kay. But even if he isn't a thief, he's plenty

of other bad things, so I shall never forgive him for making Lois run away with him!" To Lois she wrote, briefly: "Major Kay says Arthur didn't do that abominable thing. I don't know what proof he has, but I suppose he knows. Of course I was glad to hear it. But it does not alter my feelings toward Arthur. I shall never forgive him for being a Copperhead, and persuading you to run away with him. I've made a flannel petticoat for you, with scallops. I'll send it by the stage."

Lois, answering, said the petticoat was just lovely. She made no comment upon the *amende honorable*. In a way it was a new pain, for alas! it was a mistake! But she said to herself, "If Mother *thinks* he didn't, that's almost the same as forgiving him." And she was glad Arthur's father, too, was "mistaken." But the abiding sadness in her eyes did not lessen much.

The Major noticed it when he came to see her—and it made him more determined than ever to skin Bobby Buttrick alive. So far he had not got on his track; but he didn't wait for that to go to see his daughter-in-law—he adored the word! He felt that he couldn't show her tenderness enough—not on Arthur's account, but because she stood to George Kay for that holy thing he himself had never experienced: *undiscouraged love*—which is Forgiveness. It was a matter of indifference to him that the forgiveness had been unnecessary. . . . When



he had made Old Chester sufficiently uncomfortable, he took the stage for Mercer, and found his way to a boarding-house on one of those dingy streets that run back from the river. There, in a room darkened now and then by drifts of smoke and looking out on chimney pots, was Lois, her hair sunny in its beaded net, and her eyes alarmed and sweet. Arthur, of course, was away at work—a fact on which his father had carefully reckoned. He meant to go to the warehouse later, but he was in no haste to talk to a man who had sat still and let his face be slapped! As for Lois, the Major had a small blue velvet box in his pocket, and after the first greetings—a little scared on her part, eager and caressing on his part—he gave it to her, but rather shyly, because he didn't know whether she would be willing to accept a "damnation" bracelet. Lois had no scruples! In spite of that sadness in her eyes she was—after the first fear that he was angry, like everybody else—the prettiest thing! all excitement and vanity and gratitude. She hugged him, and made him strap the woven flexible gold band with its little pearl tassel around first one slender wrist and then the other, and consulted him anxiously as to which was the better—"the left wrist or the right?" She was frowning with the seriousness of a decision. He was as puzzled as she.

"You'll have to have one for each, Pretty Dear."

"Oh *no!*" she protested, blushing for fear he



would think she had been hinting. She had perched on his knee and was dangling her bracelet in this light and that; then she fitted it over his big hairy wrist, but it wouldn't meet; and she told him solemnly that it was the most beautiful thing she had ever seen in her whole entire life—"except Arthur's ring." She showed him the ring (and the Major said "Um-m-m") and told him Arthur was "so wonderful!" (And the Major said, dryly, "He is.") "And Mr. Watson has raised his salary!" Then she hoped Major Kay didn't think they were *very* wicked to have eloped? "We had to; Mother would have taken me out to California." Then she confessed, with deprecating gayety, how wicked she had been, even when she was a little girl, and went out on the shed roof and climbed down the woodbine trellis so that she could meet Arthur in the dark under the plum tree. "Oh, I'm afraid you are shocked?" she said, just a little anxiously.

"*Awfully!*" said the Major, grinning.

Then she talked to him of her mother. "I wouldn't have left her, if Arthur hadn't needed me the most."

"He was an infant crocodile, I suppose?" he said, but she didn't know what he meant; and he, feeling her fingers tremble as she fitted the bracelet around his wrist, swore to himself that he'd "have it out with that Clark woman—or anybody else who made the little thing unhappy!"

But in all the talk there was no allusion to Bobby Buttrick's lie, nor to her father-in-law's worship of forgiving love, nor to that black snake coiled on the table in his library. Slander was not a subject for the ears of a little lady—no, a great lady!—who, rather than pry into a man's affairs, bore in silence the pain of her own misapprehension. He reserved remarks about Buttrick for his son's ears when, after stopping at a jewelry store to buy another bracelet, he once more threaded his way through the storerooms of the molasses warehouse. He found Arthur at his desk in the glassed-in pen among the hogsheads. There was no discussion.

"I understand you haven't rammed Buttrick's infernal lie down his throat?"

"No, sir."

"Against your religion to horsewhip him?"

"Yes, sir."

"'Vengeance is mine, I will repay,' I suppose?"

"If you like to put it that way, sir."

"Well, far be it from me to encroach upon the prerogatives of the Almighty; but a little 'payment on account,' so to speak, is really due to Mr. Robert Buttrick."

Arthur looked at him silently.

"Therefore," the Major said, "for the honor of your wife's name, and 'on account,' I propose to skin Buttrick alive, if I have to go to hell with him afterward. But has it occurred to your extremely

sensitive conscience, Arthur, that by turning the other cheek also you have simply encouraged your friend Buttrick to keep on slapping?"

"That's his business."

Kay gaped at him; an unpleasant thought sprang into his mind. "I swear," he said, "if I didn't know it was a lie, I'd think it was the truth!"

Arthur shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, I shall attend to him," the Major said; "if for no other reason than to rejoice that sweet child who married you when all Old Chester turned up its nose at you."

"She doesn't care for Old Chester! As for me, I don't give a twopenny damn for its nose."

"Well, I do. So I'll protect Lois' honor."

"Lois' honor can't be touched by an idiotic lie about me," Arthur said. He paused. He was intensely angry, but he didn't want to be audibly impudent; also he remembered what had happened in this very office when he had been angry before; so he only said, "Cowhiding Buttrick would be a fool performance."

"That's your opinion. I have mine. Give Lois this, will you?" the Major said, tossing a little package on to Arthur's desk. "And you are to bring her home for Christmas. Understand? I'll have some more trinkets for her." He went back among the casks, saying to himself: "God save me from a 'Christian!' I suppose," he reflected, "I'll meet a

few of 'em in Heaven; but I swear, if I see one coming along a golden street—I'll run round the corner!"

Arthur, picking up the jewelry box, and calling, "Thank you, sir!" made up his mind that he wouldn't tell Lois of this ugly scene. In the first place, Lois never spoke of Bobby Buttrick now, even to call him "reptile." And besides, it would rake the whole thing up; "and she's forgetting it," he thought, tenderly.

When he took the Major's package home to Lois, her delight when she opened it and saw a bracelet for the other wrist made him wistful.

"I want to get you things like that."

"Goose! We can't afford it; and if the darling Major gives them to me, why should you?"

Arthur said, doubtfully, "You don't mind their being bought with money from that abominable lottery?"

"Gracious, no!" (Of course she had been told long ago why Arthur wouldn't eat his father's tarts, and had accepted it, in her simple way, as one of Mrs. Kay's queer ideas; but to decline the bracelet never occurred to her!)

"Somebody lost the money Father gained and spent on the thing," Arthur said, touching the gold band thoughtfully.

"Well, if they get as much fun out of gambling as I do out of my bracelets, I don't see why they

shouldn't gamble," Lois said; "the twins always said that an unlucky number was the price you paid for your fun."

Arthur told her she was a little sinner, and that one of these days he'd buy her a—a—well, "anything on earth she wanted!" Arthur was not given to much "reasoning" in those heavenly first weeks.

His father, however, going back to Old Chester, did a little reasoning on his own account. "She's forgiven him—with both hands! Royally. As a lady should. So he doesn't even know he's been forgiven!" Then he reflected. . . . "Queer thing, 'forgiveness.' What is it, anyhow? Not just justice; most of us would get pretty poor pickings with the Almighty, if it was that. And 'forgetfulness' means no brains!—and besides, love has a devilish good memory. I reckon forgiveness is Lois' way of treating a sinner—loves him more, as he deserves it less. That," Major Kay reflected, "would fill my bill." Then he had a thrill, almost of awe: Lois, "forgiving" Arthur (no matter how unnecessarily!), had the whip hand—*but never used it!* Never rubbed her "forgiveness" in; never talked sidewise to him about honesty, never preached at him or reproached him, never held his face down in the mud, as she might have done; as any other wife on earth would have done! "By God!" said the Major, "*that* kind of Christianity I can swallow! . . . I'll buy her a necklace."

## Chapter Fourteen

MAJOR KAY, occasionally fingering that leather snake coiled on his library table, began to be anxious at the delay in locating Bobby Buttrick. He was to go South after Christmas, and this business of skinning the skunk—which he proposed to remove from the hands of God—must be attended to pretty soon or wait until his next leave, which might not be for another half year. Curiously enough, for the first time in his life, he didn't like to go away from home. Lois had taken his heart prisoner; he was on his knees to a love which did not demand merit, as *quid pro quo*. Then, too, she was—what a man likes a young and pretty woman to be, and what his own wife was not and never had been—just the least little bit of a fool. But for one cause or the other, he made innumerable trips to Mercer to see his daughter-in-law, and was always giving her presents, and receiving from her knitted braces, and worsted-work slippers—lovely bunches of purple grapes on a buff ground, with a crystal “dew-drop” carefully sewed on each grape. “Be good to her,” he told his son once, in a grim aside, “or I'll wring your neck.” Agnes Kay had

felt almost the same sort of tenderness for Arthur's little simple wife when she said, "Be good to her!" But the mother meant, "be good to her because she believes in you," and the father meant, "be good to her because she doesn't believe in you."

But whatever their different reasons, they need hardly have made the demand. Arthur's goodness to his wife was exquisite and worshiping, and entirely without understanding of her deepest self, the sad self of forgiving love. Yet she was happy, in spite of the sadness. She was sure Old Chester believed, now, that Arthur had not done what Bobby said. That she was also sure Old Chester was mistaken, did not trouble her, for, she reasoned, Arthur had repented and would always be good, so God had forgiven him. All that her pitying heart need do was to love him—and forget. She had yet to discover that Love never forgets; or if it does, it is an imperfect love, like the beautiful love of a dog, faithful and unreasoning. So she was happy.

She was especially happy at Christmas time. There had been a snowstorm, and the Major got a wonderful sleigh, all upholstered in crimson velvet (the lottery had done a great business lately), and came himself and drove the two splendid horses all the twenty miles from Mercer to Old Chester. Lois sat wrapped up in a fur cape—a damnation cape!—with a hot soapstone under her little feet, and when



the horses' hoofs threw snowballs back at them, the Major laughed just as much as she did! Arthur arrived later by stage. So it was a joyous time—of little giggles and boyish guffaws, and large, jovial laughter; even Ellen Clark laughed sometimes. She was to go to Washington the day after Christmas, but she would have Christmas Day with Lois; so she put holly and laurel about the twins' photographs, and hung a flag across the chimney-breast, and invited the bride and groom to dinner. Also, of course, she had begged the honor of Major and Mrs. Kay's company; but Mrs. Kay replied—to the relief of the hostess!—that she was unable to accept. The other three went.

It was a real dinner party—Lois' first! As fashionable as anything in Philadelphia! Lois herself, in new hoops, wore a lavender and pink changeable silk, all its flounces—it was flounced to her waist—headed by garlands of tiny rosebuds; and a lace berth, quite low about her charming shoulders; and a gold bracelet with a pearl tassel on each white wrist. Mrs. Clark had ripped the crêpe off her best black silk, and fastened her point-lace collar with an old breastpin, set in pearls, and holding behind its dim glass two baby curls—one Tom's, one Harry's; and—dear, generous Ellen!—she not only refrained from calling her son-in-law's attention to the flag for which Tom and Harry had died, but she said several really kind things to him, so

there was nothing to mar the occasion, and when the flaming pudding came on the table the Major stood up and keeping time with his wine glass, sang,

“We'll drink to-night, with hearts as light,  
To loves as gay and fleeting  
As bubbles that swim on the beaker's brim  
And break on the lips while meeting.”

It was the very next day, when Mrs. Clark had set off in the morning stage for her trip to Washington, and Lois was packing up her Christmas presents, and Arthur was busy in his cabin, and George Kay was recovering from turkey and partridges and sucking pig with an apple in his mouth and a necklace of cranberries behind his crisp ears, and the flaming pudding, and mince pie (*and* toasts to the lady whose charms his daughter-in-law had so fortunately inherited!) that the news came as to Bobby Buttrick's whereabouts. It arrived late in the afternoon. The Major, reading the letter in his library, suddenly began to sing loudly, summoning Buffalo girls to “dance by the light of the moon!” Then he took a drink of whisky, and began to pack. He had not meant to start until the end of the week. “But I've got to have plenty of time for this business,” he told himself, cheerfully—and cracked the black snake which had been lying on his desk all these waiting weeks. Then he tucked

it down into his carpet bag. All this made him so late for supper that Lois came to pull him out to the table and scold him for depriving her of a minute of his society:

"You are going South and I won't see you for months," she reproached him, which pleased him, of course, immensely! Then she explained that Mrs. Kay said they were not to wait for her. "She doesn't want to leave Mary. Jane has taken a tray up to her," Lois said.

They didn't miss her. Her husband found her absence a relief; her son had forgotten her; her daughter-in-law never gave her a thought. Indeed, the only person in the world who ever wanted the mistress of the house was the demented creature in the loft who didn't now know who she was. They ate their supper, the other three, Lois sitting beside the Major and sharing all his delicious food; Arthur, by force of habit as much as principle, contentedly devouring his plain fare. George Kay was rather silent, but he had an elated look and seemed constantly on the verge of saying something—but as constantly checked himself. He was thinking just how to break his news to the Pretty Dear, who, because she was a "lady," had never asked Arthur the question which, now, Arthur's father proposed to answer. He would begin to correct her divine mistake, by intimating (casually) that it was his intention to make the fact that her husband was an

honest man, generally known. But his tenderness was so understanding that he knew he must do this very carefully, because to realize how she had misjudged Arthur (oh, how worth while to be misjudged, to be so loved!) might distress her, shame her even, by showing her what a little fool she had been. He must guard against that. And also against letting her know that he himself was aware of her mistake. *That* would embarrass her. But he wished that she might know that he worshiped the divine blunder of Love! Arthur would, too—that is, after the first shock of it. Just at first, it would be a blow. He had an instant of sympathy for his son; the boy would feel it! His pride would suffer in discovering that his wife had thought him a black-guard. “It will be hell for five minutes,” the Major reflected. However, he’d get over it.

When Jane left the room, the moment of revelation arrived. George Kay poured out a glass of ladylike Catawba for Lois, opened a new box of cigars, pushed it and the decanter of Monongahela over to his son (who ignored both), and said:

“Lois, my dear, your husband and I will drink to your good health. Then you and Arthur—fill your glass, Arthur!—and I, will drink to the skinning of the skunk!” He lifted his own little heavy-bottomed tumbler.

Lois, raising her wine glass, said, laughing and puzzled, “Skunk?”

"I am on Buttrick's track," he explained.

She put her glass down, the honey-colored wine slopping over on the tablecloth.

Arthur said, contemptuously, "Why notice him?"

The Major didn't notice the remark. He took Lois' hand and lifted it to his lips. "Little Lady, you and I, of course, know that Buttrick lied. But everybody will know it when he confesses, publicly, that he is a liar." He paused for a joyful outburst. She was silent. "I haven't spoken of this to you before," he explained, with great gentleness, "because it is not a matter one speaks of to a lady. Also, I waited until I could tell you with certainty that the defamer of your husband's honor will retract every word he has ever uttered against him."

"Oh, don't do anything to him!" she said, faintly.

"But," he said, surprised, "you want Arthur cleared? I could have wished that he had cleared himself,"—Arthur frowned.—"But that's not his way. It is mine. My idea had been," the Major went on, in that ominously genial voice, "to kick the creature to Old Chester and rub his nose in the mud at your feet."

"Oh, Major, *please*—"

"But I only just got word this afternoon where he was; and as my leave is up on Saturday, I haven't time to bring him here. So I shall stop on my way South—he's in Louisville—and Mr. Robert But-

trick will lose his hide, and then write himself down a cur, before witnesses, in a lawyer's office!"

"Arthur!" Lois said, "tell him—*tell* him he mustn't."

Arthur looked at her with tender eyes which said, "*We* understand!" Then he explained good-naturedly: "Lois thinks as I do, that revenge isn't worth while. I wish you'd drop it, Father."

"Better attend to your tatting and canary birds, Arthur. This is my affair, and—"

But Lois broke in: "I *don't* think revenge isn't worth while. It is! I've wanted to entirely kill Bobby myself, often. At least, I did want to; but now—"

"Of course you wanted to," the Major agreed (he gave Arthur a hard look); "and I'll do it for you—pretty nearly!"

"No!" she said again; "we've no right to make him say—" Her voice faded on her lips. . . . (What would happen if, attacked, Bobby *proved* that he had told the truth? Then, her mother's belief that Arthur had not been dishonest, and Old Chester's increasing certainty that Bobby was a liar, and her own carefully nourished "forgetting"—all these precious things would be destroyed!) "No! No! No," she implored; "don't make him—"

"Eat his words?" George Kay finished, trying to speak lightly, for he saw, with consternation, how completely she believed the lie—which meant how completely she loved his son. "Pretty Dear," he

said, "don't you see?—it's right to make him eat them; and he shall start his meal at the beginning, and swallow the whole bill of fare that Old Chester has been banqueting upon." (He was trying to make her laugh.) "First course: Arthur was a 'sissy' "—the Major, remembering the sewing, made a face. "Second course: Arthur was a 'coward' "—he flashed a cynical glance at his son;—"though I reckon Mr. Bobby would have been mighty glad to be safe back of the lines, himself! Third course: (Buttrick made *this* pretty dish with his own hands!) Arthur was a thief—"

Lois cried out: "No! Don't try to make him take it back! You *can't*—and if you try to, he'll—Arthur! tell your father he mustn't whip him, because—oh, Arthur, *stop* him!" She jumped up. "Don't let him!" she said, and ran out of the room. They heard her flying upstairs.

Father and son looked at each other. The Major was silent. Arthur said, "Perhaps she's afraid you'll get hurt." He thought the suggestion would make his father laugh;—then he would urge him to give up this nonsensical blood-and-thunder plan.

Instead of laughing, George Kay struck his fist on the table: "Where are your wits? She believes Buttrick told the truth." Arthur looked at him open-mouthed. "But I'll right you with her," Kay said.



“‘Right’ me? With Lois?” He longed to tell his father that he was a fool! But he only said, coldly, “Lois is incapable of such a thought.”

“Is she? Ask her. Then go down on your knees and thank God, fasting, for having a wife you don’t deserve.”

“I do that every day of my life,” Arthur retorted; “and your idea is perfectly ridiculous!”

“Arthur,” Kay said, “I don’t know what to make of you. You’re no fool, and yet you’ve no sense. I reckon you’re a reasoning fool—and neither God nor man can prevail against that.”

Arthur shrugged his shoulders. The Major scratched a match under the table, lit a cigar, and looked at his son. Then he said, quietly, “Ask her if it’s ridiculous.” He was sorry for him; it would hurt like the devil to know the truth. But it might be good for him? Might cure his cowardice? No; probably not. He was *her* son! It would be a good thing for Lois, though, if he got mad for five minutes! Then she’d stop “mothering” him, and love him as a woman loves a *man*, not a child. And he’d stop worshiping the perfect creature nobly planned, etc., etc., and just delight in a charming child—which is what a man wants in a wife. Still, George Kay was sorry for the boy; and though he said again, “Ask her,” he looked at the end of his cigar to avoid seeing his son’s face.

Arthur, springing to his feet, said, “I wouldn’t

insult Lois with such a question!" With a contemptuous gesture, he left the room.

The Major was aghast. "If you don't ask her," he called after him, "I shall be compelled to believe that I have no right to chastise Buttrick." To himself he added, uneasily "Yes, it will hit him below the belt to find that he's been an infant crocodile."

But Arthur, halfway upstairs, caught only the significance of the spoken words, and stood still for a shocked moment. "Father, *too?*" he said. So only Lois knew him?—and his mother, of course. . . . As he went on upstairs, he realized that he mustn't tell Lois of this insult—to her as well as to him! "She likes him," he thought; "it would hurt her awfully to know he was capable of such a thing!" But he had to pause for a minute outside their door to get control of himself, or his face would have betrayed him.

The room was dark, except for the fire chuckling smokily in the grate. The long mirror over the mantelpiece glimmered like shadowy water. There was just light enough for him to see that she had been crying. He came and knelt beside her, putting his arms about her.

"You mustn't mind—that sort of talk! I mean Father's idiocy." His lips tightened with anger.

She sighed, resting her cheek on his head. "But, Arthur, he *mustn't* go after Bobby, you know."

"Of course I wish he wouldn't. We don't either

of us want the thing—raked up; and all that talk about honor is childish! To be called a hog doesn't make me a hog. I felt like telling him that nobody can hurt a man's honor but the man himself. But that's Father's way."

"Bobby Buttrick has always been a reptile," she said, "but it isn't right to make him—take things back."

"It's foolish," Arthur agreed, contemptuously. "Do you remember the duel Father fought? Absurd! Just like cowniding Bobby. But he can't reason to save his life—and Mother, to save her life, can't help reasoning. Isn't it queer how different they are? Now, we are exactly alike. Well, Mr. Robert Buttrick deserves a hiding, if anybody ever did! I've had moments myself when I wanted to throttle him. He started 'Sissy,' you know. Father's right about that. And he was the one who found me in the cellar with Rover; so I owe 'coward' to him, too. Of course *that* stuck, when I didn't enlist."

"I used to hate him for saying that," she said; "and I told him he was afraid, too."

"Too? What do you mean?"

"Afraid of being struck by lightning."

"I? Did you think I was afraid of being struck?"

"Why, I thought you didn't like thunder-storms," she said, surprised at his question; "of course I knew you couldn't help it."

"You mean you thought I went into the cellar with Rover, because *I*—?" He was divided between amusement and amazement. "You've thought that about me? All this time!"

She didn't answer.

"I wonder you didn't call me 'Sissy,' too," he teased.

"Oh, Arthur!" she reproached him.

"That was a joke—dear literal angel! But Lois, when I look back, I do get sort of sore. I had a bad time of it when I was a boy because I sewed."

"Why *did* you?" she said, in a burst of distress. "I just hated to have you do it! The twins—dear Tom and Harry!—they made fun. . . . I used to get so mad at them."

"I didn't like doing it," he said, simply; "but I wanted to earn money to buy a coat."

"Why didn't you say so!"

"It was nobody's business. And, anyway, I never cared what people thought."

"Oh, I did hate it," she sighed.

"I didn't know you minded. Lois, you are a—wonder! You never said a word to me about it!" He kissed the palm of her hand. Then, whistling, got up from his knees and went fumbling about in the darkness to light the lamp on the bureau. He was still coldly angry at his father's words; he longed to tell Lois of them—Lois! the one living creature, beside Rover (this time he forgot his

mother), who had never distrusted him. But he wouldn't tell her; he just came back and knelt beside her again, and put his arms around her. The only sound was the fire, sputtering softly, and the ticking of the clock that hung between the windows.

"How happy we are," he said, "in spite of everything! Well, there won't be anything more—like that."

"No! Never! Never."

"We'll just forget it," he said, tenderly (and his father wanted him to disturb her peace!).

She gave a broken sigh. "*Everybody* must forget it. That's why I don't want your father to do anything about it."

He rose; wandered about the room with his hands in his pockets; looked out of the window, and said it was snowing. Then sat down astride a chair. "Father is sort of cracked on this horsewhipping business," he said, abruptly. "I'm afraid we can't stop him." What obscure impulse made him add the very words he had told himself must not be said? "He has got it into his head that—you thought things about me, too."

She was standing, looking down at him; the lamp was behind her on the bureau, but he saw that she was pale. "It isn't fair," she said, with a sort of agonized obstinacy, "to go back to those old things, and *force* Bobby Buttrick to say—differently."

Arthur was suddenly attentive. "Not fair? You mean, to make him say I *wasn't* a coward?"

"It will just make people remember," she said, despairingly; "and they're forgetting it, now."

There was a moment of silence; then Arthur's eyes narrowed. "Lois," he said, "*you* didn't think that I didn't volunteer because I was afraid?"

"I knew you thought war was wrong."

"But, Lois! You thought I was—afraid?"

They looked at each other. Arthur, astride his chair, his arms folded along its back; Lois in front of him. Neither of them spoke. Except for the little snapping fire under the black marble mantel-piece and the lamp on the bureau, the room, with its great four-poster, was full of shadows. Suddenly the silence tingled with panic.

"I supposed *you*—understood!" he said.

"I did. I knew you couldn't help it. And it didn't matter."

"'Didn't matter'?" He got on to his feet; his eyes were aghast. "But that's impossible! It mattered more than anything on earth! Lois, think! If I didn't enlist because I was 'afraid,' then I talked a lot of stuff about right and wrong, when really I was just a coward! In other words, I was a liar *and* a coward."

"No! You truly thought war was wicked. You just didn't say why you didn't want to fight. I didn't mind," she said, pitifully.

"Lois!" he said, loudly. "My God! what are you saying to me? You thought I was a coward and a liar . . . and you 'didn't mind'?" He rubbed his hands over his face, as if trying to brush some blurring web away. "Then perhaps you thought—I sold the socks?"

"Oh, Arthur—don't let us go back to that!"

"Did you?"

"Oh—I knew that you—you didn't mean to do—anything wrong—but perhaps just that once—you had to have—money, so you—"

"Did you? *Did you?* Answer me!"

"You wouldn't deny it."

"Did you?"

"When I asked you, you said you *couldn't* deny it."

He went mechanically over to the fireplace and stood there with his back to her, his elbow on the mantel. In the long mirror hanging lengthwise, Lois' white face as she stood behind him glimmered out like the face of one drowned in deep waters. But he did not look at her. He took up a little china match-box and seemed to examine it, turning it this way and that, as if studying its shape and color. He said, as if to himself, "I was right that night up in the cabin." After that there was silence, except for the ticking of the clock.

Then Lois said, breathlessly, "Arthur! Are you angry?"



"Why, no, I don't think I'm angry," he said, examining the match-box. "No, I'm not angry. I just . . . don't care."

"But you look so—queer!" His face in the glass, dully indifferent, was a face she didn't know.

Then suddenly their mirrored eyes met—hers cowering and shifting; his immovably appalled. "You thought," he said, "I was . . . a coward;" he paused and fitted the little blue and green china lid on to the match-box, very slowly and carefully. "And a liar. And a thief." He turned sharply, his bent elbow sweeping the box off the mantel to smash on the brick hearth. Then he looked at her. There were no words; just a look.

She backed away from him, sank down into a chair; "*You didn't do it!*"

"My father thought it," he said. "Now you think it. It will be Mother next. Rover is dead." He didn't seem to hear her saying again, faintly, "You didn't—you didn't—"

Then she looked up at him. "Of course you are angry at me, but don't you suppose, if you try, you can forgive me?"

He was not listening. "You have never known me," he said. "I see, now, that from the beginning you haven't known me. You have supposed I was . . . all those things! But then, why did you marry me? I can't understand why you married me, if you thought I was . . . You! Marry a crea-

ture like that? *You?*" His anger had gone. Horror left no room for anger.

She was speechless. Then her suffering voice said: "Arthur, won't you please, just for a minute, listen? . . . You are going to forgive me?"

He reflected. "I don't know what you mean by forgiveness. It's . . . the end."

"I forgave you!" she said.

"But," he said, in a whisper, "*you oughtn't to have forgiven me.*"

She held out frightened hands. "I loved you, Arthur."

"You oughtn't to have loved me!" They stared at each other—two strangers. Then he cried out: "Why did you love me! I could have borne it if you had hated me. I could have worshiped your hate! Then I wouldn't have lost—everything. But now—" He walked over to the door and stood with his hand on the knob. "I'll go away," he said; "I won't come back, ever. So you won't have to see me again. You wouldn't want to, because you don't love *me*. You love—a *thief*," he said, in a whisper. But on the threshold he turned and looked back at her, where she sat, her head bowed on her knees. His face was ravaged. "I never knew you," he said.

She sprang up and tried to speak, but he had gone. She heard his step on the stairs.

She stood perfectly still, her mouth fallen open,

her eyes wide. Then, down in the hall, she heard the front door close.

She was not conscious of anything but the closing of the door—that, and the ticking of the clock, and her blood pounding in her temples, were all she heard. They were clamorous. They deafened her. Suddenly her knees felt queer and she sat down. She sat there a long time, not thinking, not even feeling. Once she saw that the lamp was smoking; one side of the chimney had blackened. She got up and turned the wick down. . . .

*Arthur was not a thief.*

That was the first clear thought. It brought a stab of joy. But instantly the joy was gone, for she remembered: She had wronged him. She had accused him. She had insulted him. To be sure, she had loved him; but that didn't matter. He didn't care for that. He didn't know her. He would never see her again.

It must have been an hour that she sat there; then through these numb thoughts she became vaguely conscious of a sound—not the clock, or the grumble of the fire, or her own pulse in her ears. Just a sound, repeated. And repeated. And repeated. It had no meaning; it was only a sound. "Arthur—" the sound was. And again: "Arthur. Arthur." Still she sat there; and still the sound came. She first became aware that it had meaning,

when it was "George"—not "Arthur." "George!" pierced through the fog and reached her mind.

"Come! Somebody! George! Come—Arthur—" Lois looked blankly about. She said, aloud, "He's gone."

Then came "Lois!"

At that she started, as one asleep starts at a touch. "Yes?" she said. She moved stupidly toward her door, opened it, and heard the call again, now wildly clear—

"Lois!"

"What is it?" she said, dully. Then recognized Agnes Kay's voice calling from the loft, for her husband—for her son!—even for her daughter-in-law. "Something is the matter," Lois thought. Suddenly everything cleared; she ran out into the hall—the voice came again: "George! George!" She called back, "Yes! I'll get him!"—and flew down the two long flights of stairs. The Major was smoking in his library, a little table beside him with a decanter on it, and *The Adventures of Mr. Verdant Green* open in his hand. But he was not reading. He was uneasy about that advice he had given Arthur. Would the Pretty Dear be too much upset? He was turning a page with unseeing eyes, when Lois burst in upon him. "She's calling! Come!"

"Who? Where?"

"In the loft!"

He dropped his book and rushed ahead of her

up to the top of the house. The door of Mary's room was open; and they could see Agnes Kay sitting on the bed, holding up a big woman whose vacant face lolled on her breast.

"Get Dr. King!" she called. "I can't leave her."

The Major, hurrying down the loft, called back to Lois, "Tell Arthur to run for the doctor! Quick!" In Mary's room, he put his arm under his wife's, and with his other hand pushed her gently aside, until, taking her place on the edge of the bed, he could support the sagging mass of flesh. "Agnes, sit down! You're fainting—"

She nodded and sank into a chair. Then gasping she began to tell him: "She was—uncomfortable before supper. But about an hour ago—I had to lift her. I couldn't let her lie down; she—choked. I managed to run and—open the door and call. I kept calling. Nobody heard. I'm sorry to—trouble you."

The face on Kay's shoulder turned; he glanced down at it, recoiled, almost let the woman fall from his arms, then caught her again. "Good God!" he said.

"She isn't suffering, now," his wife said. She rose and looked at the slightly convulsed face; "I think she's coming to."

The eyes of the woman on the bed opened; there was no understanding in them. They just stared up into Kay's eyes, and the lips parted into meaning-

less repetition of the old words—"Beau Kay—Beau Kay—Beau—"

He said, very low, "Mary."

There was no answering recognition in the fixed stare; the lids began to drop, to close. She muttered—muttered. She slept. Still he held her.

"Has Arthur gone for Dr. King?"

"Lois sent him."

"I think this is the end," Agnes said; then he heard her praying: "Lord Jesus, come quickly." But to Mary she said, very gently, "Don't be frightened, Mary, dear." There was a long silence.

He said, in a whisper, "She's been here all this time?" She made no answer. Again silence—and the breathing. Slower—slower.

Then a sound from the poor, wide-open lips. Agnes knelt down and took the inert hand. "Mary, I've been impatient sometimes. I—I'm sorry. Forgive me." Her voice broke, then steadied into quietness: "You'll be free soon, dear Mary." She would have stroked the hand—but it lifted and groped; and Agnes, bending her head, guided it to her short gray hair; it fumbled into the old, repulsive caress; slipped; fell. It was the end. George Kay trembled. A minute later his wife said, "She has gone."

Out in the white darkness of the storm, bare-headed, Lois was running along the road toward William King's house; she didn't think much about

anything—except that she was cold. “Why, I forgot my cloak!” she thought; “but I can’t go back for it. He said, ‘tell Arthur to *run*’.” She couldn’t tell Arthur. He wasn’t there. So she must run. She tried to, stumbling through the heavy snow. She wondered why she must “run.” Something had happened; she knew that. Was it in the loft? No, it was in her own room, in the mirror over the fireplace. Oh yes; she remembered: Arthur had looked at her out of the glass. . . . That was what had happened: Arthur had looked at her. Then he said—in her effort to remember what he said, she stopped running and stood still; he said he was going away. He said he would never come back. . . . She began to run again. It was very dark in the thick whiteness of the storm. She slipped on an icy place under the snow, fell, then stumbled to her feet. She wished she had brought a lantern—the carriage-house lantern. She had carried it the night she and Emma went up to the cabin. Arthur was unhappy that night because she hadn’t said she loved him, *anyhow*. Now he was unhappy because she said she did love him, “anyhow.” But, oh, he hadn’t done that awful thing! How happy she was! Yet he couldn’t forgive her for loving him. In the looking-glass he had been angry—because she loved him! Stupid not to have brought the lantern! Oh, there was Dr. King’s house. She wondered how long Mrs. Kay had been calling. She wondered why she hadn’t



heard her—and yet had heard her. She wondered what Arthur meant by saying that she didn't love him. (Her fingers were on William King's door bell.) She wondered why he said, "I never knew you." . . .

She must, without knowing it, have pulled the bell, for the door opened; but she stood silent, absorbed in wondering. "Well?" said Mrs. King, holding up a lamp and peering out to see who it was. Then, recognizing the little snowy figure, she cried out, "Good gracious! It's Lois Clark—with nothing on! What's the matter? Where's your bonnet? William! Come here."

"Mrs. Kay said get Dr. King."

Martha, really frightened, called again, "Willy!" And as the doctor came hurrying through the hall she exclaimed: "Look at this child! Is she going to faint?"

William wasn't sure, but he said, "No, indeed! She's just cold;" and drew the silent girl into the house and to the sitting-room fire. "What's the matter, Lois?"

"The Major said, 'Tell Arthur to run for the doctor.' Arthur—wasn't there. I came." She was shivering violently.

"Well, Mrs. King will bundle you up, and you come along back with me," William said, in his comfortable voice. "Get her something hot to drink, Martha! The buggy? No, I won't wait

to hitch up—we'll get there quicker on shanks' mare, won't we, Lois? No—*No!* Don't bother about gums *now!* Her feet can't be any wetter than they are. Isn't there some warm milk in the kitchen?" He waited until Lois's teeth chattered against a cup of hot milk; then pinned a big shawl about her, and they started. He kept his arm around her waist, because, he said, it was hard walking. They were halfway back before he said, casually, "What's wrong?"

"Arthur—went away."

"Who is sick?"

"I think . . ." her voice kept dropping to a whisper; "Mary is . . ." she couldn't think of a word; by and by she said, "fussy." She didn't speak again until they reached the Kay house. At her bedroom door the doctor said, "Get out of those wet clothes, Lois, quickly!" Then he went on up the garret stairs. He met Kay and his wife coming down.

"It is over," Agnes said.

The Major was silent.

"I'm sorry I wasn't here, Mrs. Kay," the doctor said. "I hope you weren't alone?"

"I was there," Kay said huskily, "at the end."

("As you were," William thought, "at the beginning.") But all he said, quietly, was: "I'll go up. No, Mrs. Kay, don't you come. Go and lie

down; you are worn out. The Major'll go with me. I'd better just look at her."

Agnes Kay said, faintly, "Thank you," and went on down to her own room. Perhaps it flashed into her mind, that May afternoon twenty-one years ago?—the grass and violets and white fire of the blossoming pear trees; the bowed shutters, and the strips of sunshine; the clumsy figure in the dusty shoes on the great white bed. Now—snow and darkness, and the big feet at the end of the journey. . . .

The two men went in silence up to the loft and into that room where the door, at last wide open, need never be locked any more. Kay held the lamp high, and the doctor, bending over, made the necessary examination.

"I knew it was near," he said when he lifted his head, "but I didn't think it would come for a fortnight or so."

They stood for a moment looking down at her. Kay's whole face trembled; the lamp, wavering in his hand, made his shadow lurch and stagger across the ceiling. "My *God!*" he said. They went back through the loft in silence. At the head of the narrow, twisting steps, Kay said, in a muffled voice, "Wait a minute. I want to speak to you." The doctor paused. "It's twenty-one years. I was calculating. Arthur was a year old. It was the year before I bought the lottery."

"I remember when she came," William said.

"Did you know . . . who she was?"

"Mrs. Kay never told me."

"She never told anybody! To save me from being known—for what I was."

The doctor said nothing.

"I suppose that was why she wouldn't let the servants or anybody else help her? For fear they'd—suspect. All these years! Shut up with my—with a mad woman. Did you ever know courage like that?"

"I certainly never did," William said.

"King," the Major said, passionately "(hold the lamp will you, till I get my handkerchief?) *she* has paid the piper for the dance I had with that poor creature! A trollop, she was, Willy, when I first knew her, poor thing! I don't want you to think worse of me than you have to. But my wife—The Holy Ghost, William, the Holy Ghost!" He blew his nose. The doctor knew he was crying. Then he said, "And I said she was 'righteous over-much'! And I called her a coward. A *coward*, William—that woman! I'm the greatest fool that ever lived."

The doctor was silent; he could offer no comfort of denial. As they went down to the next floor, he heard Kay, behind him, saying brokenly, "She could have put me in a corner with my face to the wall every day of the week, *and she didn't*. . . . King!

do you know any *man*, who would have held an ace, as she did, and not played it?" The doctor shook his head. "It would *never* have been played," the Major said, "if I hadn't happened to be here . . . to-night. God forced her hand!"

They went down the next flight of stairs in silence, and paused at Mrs. Kay's door. Her husband stood in the hall, not daring to cross the threshold, but the doctor entered. He told her he would go and get his wife and a neighboring woman. "You will need help," he said gently. "Betsey and Jane won't be much use." She thanked him, in her exhausted voice.

The Major, going on down to the library with him, said, "Arthur will hitch up and take you home, and bring Mrs. King back. But come in here first; we both need a drink of whisky."

"No, we don't, if you'll allow me to say so," William said, "and I can walk. Besides, Arthur isn't at home. Lois came for me."

"Where is Arthur?" Kay said.

## *Chapter Fifteen*

THE Major, knocking at Lois's door, said, in the hushed voice of the house of death, "Where is Arthur?"

Lois, on the other side of the door, said something he couldn't understand. He turned the knob and entered; she was sitting on the side of her bed, still in her soaked shoes and dripping skirts. She shivered, and looked at him silently.

"Has he gone out, Lois?"

She nodded.

"Well, you go and sit with Mrs. Kay. She mustn't be alone. The—the woman is dead." He turned away, then paused on the threshold to say, kindly, "Don't be frightened, Pretty Dear. Death isn't the worst thing in the world. I reckon life's neck and neck with it, for—unpleasantness. When will Arthur be back?"

"I don't know."

"Why did he go out—in the storm!" her father-in-law said, sharply; "he is needed. He ought to be here!"

"He was—angry," Lois said, faintly.

Instantly the Major's excited irritation collapsed.

He closed Lois' door, and stood frowning in the hall. Had Arthur, acting on his advice, asked Lois that question, and had her answer been too much for him? It might be so, Arthur being what he was. Yes, with his confounded queerness, he might, if he was *too* mad, do—anything! "He's that sort," the Major thought, with alarm. Then he tried to reassure himself: "He has just dashed out to cool off by tearing 'round awhile in the snow!" As he passed his wife's open door, he glanced in, and saw her sitting in a straight chair, her hands hanging at her sides, her head sagging forward. "He'd better come home and see his mother's brand of forgiveness!" he told himself; and called to her, timidly, "Do rest, Agnes." She didn't answer, and he went on down to his library. He felt suddenly scared of women, and their ways! He couldn't understand them: his daughter-in-law—loving and forgiving a "thief"; his wife, nursing his insane mistress! and—and Mary herself; "Good heavens, *Mary*, coming to Agnes!" How did she get here? What made her come? "No, you never know how women will act," he thought. As for Arthur, of course he was angry, as Lois said; "but if he doesn't come home soon, I'll boot him when he does come. But he'll come. On his hands and knees! At least, that would be *me*."

His wife had not even heard him tell her to rest. She was too profoundly exhausted from that long



lifting of the dying woman, to think of him. Indeed, she could not think of anything; she was not conscious of the relief of knowing that the dying had ceased; and the washing and dressing had ceased; and the carrying food up the twisting garret stairs, three times a day, every day in the week, every week in the year—every year of the twenty-one; all that had ceased. And the strain of holding back feebly loving hands from clutching at her hair was over; and the putting the animals out, two by two, to walk into the ark between the little painted green trees; and the singing

Lord Lovel stood at his castle gate—

all over, all ended. She wondered, vaguely, what she would do, now, "with nothing to do." She felt, perhaps for the first time in her life, lonely; Mary was gone. She had had no one else. She heard Lois's step and said, looking around with a long breath of fatigue, "Poor Mary is dead, Lois."

"Yes," Lois said.

There was silence. Then, "Where is Arthur?"

"I don't know."

Something in her voice made Agnes Kay look at her; "What is the matter, Lois?"

"He—went out."

Her mother-in-law thought, "They have quarreled about something." How foolish quarreling seemed, now! "Is there anything the matter?"

"He is angry. He went . . . away."

"Lois," Agnes said, "I don't know what it is about, of course, but nothing is worth a quarrel. Nothing! It is just—vanity. I know that, Lois. Mary is dead."

Lois looked at her blankly; she didn't know what the words meant. So again there was silence, until there were voices on the stairs: Mrs. King's, the doctor's, George Kay's. Then William King came quietly into the room and asked where something which was needed upstairs could be found. "No—don't you get it, Mrs. Kay. Tell Lois."

Lois was told; but while, numbly, she went to this closet or that bureau drawer her mother-in-law got on her feet—a wounded soldier picking up his fallen sword!—and went, with Mrs. King and a woman neighbor, up to the loft. There were, she said, things which only she could attend to. Lois, holding the pile of linen in her arms, stood at the foot of the attic stairs, while the others silently came and went, taking what was needed. Betsey and Jane huddled behind her. Their faces were gray under their black skins.

"Hear me, a-chatterin'!" Betsey said; "I wouldn't set foot in that loft for nothin'!" And Jane, swaying back and forth on her heels, muttered, "My Jesus—Captain Jesus! They's ghos's outside dis house, in de snow! Where's Mistah Arthur?"

Lois said, vacantly, "I don't know."

"Say then, Miss Lois," Betsey coaxed, "supposin' you was to run over an' git Emma? Maybe she kin help 'em upstairs? I ain't feelin' well myself, on 'count o' the weather, er I'd go."

"Ner me, neither," said Jane.

Lois, obeying stupidly, went downstairs, but paused in the hall to look, with dull eyes, at her father-in-law moving about in his library. Apparently he was hunting for something on his desk, then in the closet where he kept his liquor; then he went to a table and moved some books and papers; stood still, frowned, as if trying to remember; then, quickly, opening his valise, dragged things out of it—shirts, braces, white dickeys, black stocks; he flung them all on the floor, thrust his hand into one corner, and pulled out what he had been looking for. For a minute he held it, coiled, in his hand. It was then that he noticed Lois standing in the hall, and called her—"Lois!"

She came in, and he put his arm around her. "Lois," he said, "I want to tell you something: your mother-in-law has—for twenty-one years she has . . . carried my sins. I'm not a religious man. 'Course you know that. But I—I've been thinking . . . There was One who—who did that. . . . Oh," he said, passionately, "what does it matter about Buttrick?" He ran the whip through a closed

hand, looked at it, and flung it into the fire. They stood together, silently, watching it as it curled and hissed on the coals. Above, on the chimney breast, was the old sword, which a little boy once held as a lover holds his lady's hand. Suddenly George Kay folded his arms along the mantelpiece and hid his face on them. He had forgotten Lois's presence.

She waited a minute, not knowing what to do; then tiptoed out of the room and, opening the front door, went, as Jane and Betsey had bidden her, under the pear trees heavy with snow, to the back door of her mother's house. In the kitchen, reading by the light of a kerosene lamp, was Emma. She looked over the steel-rimmed spectacles that rested on her broad nose, and saw her young lady—very pale.

"What on *airth*?" said Emma.

"Mary is dead."

Emma, folding her *Ledger* and putting on her other glasses, got up in clumsy haste. "I'll run acrost!" she said. She threw a little shawl over her white hair; "Betsey and Jane's scared to death, I suppose?—It's that way with niggers. Why didn't Mr. Arthur come over, 'stead of you trompin' in the snow! Where is he?"

"I don't know," Lois said.

"Well, come on along!" Emma said, and locked the kitchen door behind them.

As they entered the Kay house the Major, in the library, called, peremptorily, "That you, Arthur?"

"No," Lois said.

"Where is Arthur?" her father-in-law said, fuming.

At midnight, when the big house was silent, and dark except for the light burning in the loft chamber by that bed covered with a white sheet—the question was asked for the last time. . . .

Lois, in her room, was standing at the window, her hands cupping around her face pressed against the glass. She had not undressed; the fire was out, and it was very cold. She did not hear her mother-in-law's knock, but she turned as Agnes Kay entered.

"Hasn't Arthur come home yet? Where is he!"

Lois, speechless, shook her head.

Arthur's mother hesitated. "Lois, don't be hard. I—was hard sometimes. And nothing is ever gained by it. . . . Tell him, when he comes in, that I want to speak to him."

Lois looked at her numbly, and Agnes Kay went back to her room. She thought, wearily, that she mustn't be impatient with the childishness of Lois and Arthur; but to squabble, in a world of love and death . . . and sin; it was difficult to be patient with that. She began to undress, but she would not, she said to herself, get into bed, for she might fall asleep and not hear him when he came in; and she must see him. She must tell him that nothing mat-

ters, except hardness. I was hard to *her*, just at first, poor Mary! and I've always been hard to George." Then a thought stabbed her: George's body had conquered him; but had her mind conquered her?—for hardness is a thing of the mind. "It is conceit," she thought, and shivered; "worse, so much worse than anything the poor body does! Oh, I must tell Arthur never to be hard." It seemed impossible, so great was her confused exhaustion, to wait until morning to tell him; he must know it now, while Mary, to whom she owed this first glimpse of the deep serenities of humility, lay dead in the loft. That she might tell him, she sat up in the straight chair to keep awake and listen for his step. The clock struck one. "How angry he must be," she thought, "to stay away from her so long—and how foolish!" She went out to look over the banisters and listen. Everything was dark, except for a thin streak of light from the library, lying across the hall floor. Was George, too, sitting up for Arthur? Very softly, in her gray flannel dressing gown, she went downstairs, slipping like a shade across that crack of light, and opening the front door, looked out into the windless night of falling snow. There was a drift across the steps, and the path down to the white silhouette of the great iron gates was hidden. There was no sign of her boy.

As she closed the door, her husband came out into

the hall; his face was as haggard as hers. "I thought it was Arthur," he said. "Hasn't he come back?"

She shook her head.

"Why is he out at this time of night—and with trouble in the house?" he said, with the irritability of alarm.

"He and Lois had some difference. He annoyed her in some way; and I suppose she was impatient. So he went out."

"I reckon it was she who annoyed him," he said, grimly; "fact is, it's my fault. I got mad and let out to him at supper that she believes Buttrick told the truth about him. Probably it's knocked him over."

"*Lois?* Believes Arthur sold——? Impossible!"

"Yes, she does—dear little fool. Her mother told me so. Said Lois told her so. Said she 'forgave him.' Divine!" (But he was thinking of the divineness of the loft—not Lois's tender stupidity.)

"Then *that* is what they quarreled about?" his wife said, and suddenly in her voice was the sound of frightened wings. "Oh, but *that* is real trouble; that is terrible! I thought it was some childishness——"

"It's no childishness to find that your wife has been thinking you a despicable cur. It would be hell for most men."

"Poor little Lois! But she has never been very intelligent, George."

"Intelligence isn't what counts," he said; "and as



for Lois, you can't altogether blame her. He wouldn't deny it to her; Mrs. Clark said so. He's got my confounded pride in him, I suppose."

Perhaps some voice within her cried out, "Mine too!"—for her strained face turned darkly red and the vein hammered on her temple. "What will it do to him?" she said.

They looked at each other in wordless consternation. Then George Kay said: "You go to bed. I'll sit up for him."

"He may never come back!" she said.

"Of course he will! She's hit his self-esteem, which is enough to knock any man out of the ring—temporarily. But Arthur won't stand on any two-penny dignity before a love like Lois! He'll come back." He wasn't altogether certain of this, but he had an overwhelming impulse to reassure her; it was the first time in all their married life that he had felt that she needed him. "Don't be worried," he entreated her; "he'll crawl back—he's my son!" In spite of his terrible preoccupation about the loft, he was himself very much worried; Arthur was his son, but he was hers, too—and she had never crawled in her life!

"He'll never forgive her!" she said. She covered her face with her hands, and instantly George Kay quailed. Weakness in her, frightened him. It was like seeing the stars stagger in their courses!

"Don't!" he said. "Agnes, look here; *don't*. Of

course he'll forgive her. It would be a damned sight worse than selling socks, not to!" He was trembling; his levity was sheer self defence.

"He has never cared for anybody's opinion. He may not care now, for hers!" she said.

"A man's wife isn't 'anybody,'" he rallied her. "Why! your wife's opinion (when you're first married) is more to you than the Almighty's! Of course, you get over that, if she gets over caring for you—" He saw the implication, and added, hurriedly, "I mean some men do."

But she was too alarmed to see anything personal in his words. "Perhaps she won't forgive him?" Her lip began to tremble.

"Forgive him? Lois? Why, she doesn't know the meaning of the word! She'll just love him. And that's all the forgiveness a man wants—love. Agnes, would you mind—not crying? I—I don't know what to do."

He was like a frightened child. "I won't cry," she said, and smiled wanly; "but if he doesn't come back to her he will be lost! I must go out and hunt for him, and reason with him." He winced at her word, but he only said,

"You can't at this time of night! And in the snow. I'll go." He was terrified at her tears—she was wiping her eyes on the sleeve of her dressing gown. He had never, in all their desolate years, seen her cry! ("Had she," he wondered, "ever cried

up there in the loft with—with *her?*") "I'll find him, Agnes. Don't you give him another thought! I'll make him come back—"

"No!" she interrupted, trembling; "No!—You mustn't—"

"I reckon he's gone up to that cabin of his," he went on; "I'll put on my boots, and go and tell him what I think of him, for having scared you!" ("Scared?" He thought of the room with the barred windows. "She doesn't know the meaning of the word!") "He'll come home," he said.

"You don't know him! He is—determined. Oh, very determined, George. He is like—both of us."

"If he's like *you*, that's enough. Agnes! Don't doubt him. Why, his religion would bring him back, even if he hadn't any sense of honor. But he has! Underneath, he has. Nothing can stamp honor out, in *your* son." He paused; then in a broken whisper, he said, "God, never made another woman like you. . . . Oh, Agnes, look here; *don't* cry! I'll—I'll put my boots on—"

He left her standing in the hall, outside his door. He couldn't bear her bent arm across her eyes a minute longer! When he came back, in his high boots and army overcoat, she was entirely composed,—just standing waiting for him, with a dignity untouched by the short hair and the ugly dressing gown. He said, "Come sit in the library until he comes in. I'll start the fire."

She followed him in silence, except, as she entered the room, to say, nervously, "I smell something burning!"

"Just a piece of leather."

She let him put her into his big chair and bring a blanket from his own bed to wrap around her and place a footstool under her feet. She yielded to his care with a vague awkwardness. She didn't know how to be taken care of.

"I'll bring him," he said—but she said, quickly, "No! He must not be brought! There will be no hope for them if he is 'brought'!"

He made no answer; he only bent down and very gently lifted her hand to his lips. Then he went out into the snow. . . .

Sitting there before the fire, where the charred leather still smoldered in the ashes, she could not, somehow, keep awake. She fought against sleep, but her eyelids drooped; then her head fell sidewise. She slept.

The clock struck two. Struck three. Upstairs, Lois had sunk down on the floor, but her chin rested on the window sill, and she watched. Watched. So it was she who saw him first, far down the road; saw him coming, plodding heavily; saw him push open the gates, the pads of snow falling noiselessly into deeper snow; saw him come up the path to the house and stop to knock the snow from his boots on the top step. She got up, stiff and shiver-

ing, and, turning, stood with her back to the window, her little cold fingers pressed tight against her lips. She waited. . . .

There was a long moment of fitting the key into the lock; then the front door opened—and shut, softly.

His mother, starting from her sleep at the sound, saw him in the hall, and, pushing the enfolding blanket aside, struggled to her feet; but before she could reach him he was halfway upstairs. She called, but he didn't hear her. Or if he did he did not turn back. She heard him open their bedroom door, but she could not hear his voice—a shamed and broken voice: "*Lois—Lois—*"

The door closed.

THE END

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